

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE BLUE LION
THE PEAL OF BELLS
THE MONEY BOX
THE ORANGE TREE
THE LITTLE ANGEL
THE GOLDFISH
THE PLEASURES OF IGNORANCE

THE GREEN MAN

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("Y.Y.")



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I. A B C



THERE is a misleading saying, 'As easy as A B C'. It was invented, I am sure, not by children parroting their first lessons in the alphabet but by some pompous adult who, having learned to spell 'pteridophyte' and 'ptyalogogue', became puffed up and forgot that there was a time when even he had to search the deeps of his brain in order to tell the difference between the first and second letters. Few people, I suppose, remember those early intellectual struggles. I, at least, cannot remember the day when I first achieved the glorious certitude that A was A and that I should recognize it if I met it at the far end of the world, for I had learned the elements of lecture from a book called *Reading Without Tears* some time before I went to school. But that the conquest of the alphabet was not achieved without labour I am convinced. What other explanation can there be of the fact that I left the nursery for the kindergarten with the look of one prematurely aged, a child of five who had already drunk of the Pierian spring to excess? If I were psycho-analysed, who knows what buried hatred of P's and Q's might be brought to light—a hatred that may be exercising a malign influence on my conduct even to-day?

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Certainly, if it was as difficult to learn the alphabet as it was to learn the elements of other subjects that were afterwards thrust upon me by schoolmistresses and schoolmasters, it is no wonder that I went to school with knitted brows. The first lessons in algebra, for example, in which I was set to multiply various letters of the alphabet by each other, seemed to me to be nonsense so gross that it was of no use even to attempt to understand it. The child's rhyme that begins 'Multiplication is vexation' shows that it is also the common lot to have been tortured by the elements of arithmetic. As for Euclid, I remember vainly trying to understand a cousin's attempt to prove that the line that bisects the angle at the apex of an isosceles triangle also bisects the base. He carefully drew a line from the apex to the base in order to begin his demonstration. 'But,' I protested, 'it doesn't say you may draw as long a line as that. You could bisect the angle with a line that only came half-way down to the base, and, if it doesn't reach the base, how can it bisect it?' 'Of course it reaches the base,' he said. 'It needn't,' said I; and I drew a little line hanging down about a quarter of an inch from the top of the triangle; 'that's a line, isn't it? And it doesn't bisect the base because it doesn't come near it.' 'But if it were prolonged it would,' he declared. 'But it isn't prolonged,' I persisted. 'Then let's prolong it,' he said.

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‘But it doesn’t say you may prolong it,’ I replied; ‘it says the line that bisects the angle A B C bisects the base, and I’ve drawn one that doesn’t.’ ‘But can’t you see,’ he cried, bewildered by my clear-mindedness, ‘that it’s an imaginary line and that you can make it as long as you like? If you couldn’t, the whole thing would be nonsense.’ ‘I think it is nonsense,’ I assured him; ‘what you really mean is that a short line won’t bisect the base but that a long line will. Why don’t you say so?’

The languages came more easily, though I could not at first see why in *The Gallic War* Julius Caesar deliberately put the words in the wrong order, and the opening sentence seemed to me for a time as difficult as a Torquemada puzzle. Then came physics with talk of ohms and volts, in the existence of which I am inclined to disbelieve to the present day. Then I made yet another beginning with logic, during the lectures on which subject, after an inauspicious introduction to Barbara Celarent, it was my habit to escape into the Botanic Gardens and study wisdom peripatetically. In such subjects I had a mind as it were declutched from understanding, and even the A B C of them was to me as difficult as the most beknotted lines of Persius.

And so it has been throughout life with almost every subject that I have attempted to master. Again and again, with spirit refreshed I have

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advanced upon a new attainment-to-be, flattering myself that here at last was a subject the A B C of which would come to me as naturally as the blossoming of a flower. Never, however, has my innocent expectation been fulfilled. Anthropology, botany, the Irish language, gardening, golf—I have tried them all and found the Irish language the easiest of them; and the Irish language is not easy. 'It's all a matter o' practice, sir,' the caddie assured me lately when I was playing what I hoped was golf and when the ball had not gone where I intended it to go. 'After a bit, it'll all come as easy as kiss me 'and.' I did not pause to assure him that I should have found it by no means easy to kiss his hand; but the A B C of golf I found even more difficult than that. As for anthropology, I retired from it, a beaten man, when it came to measuring the cephalic indexes of Chickahoming Indians; and the Latin of the botanists was more unintelligible to me than the ohms and volts of physics.

Unable to profit by experience, however, I continue to look for other A B C's of other worlds that I feel must be there for me to conquer. It was in this spirit that I recently set out to learn to drive a motor-car. It must, I told myself, be easy since even the most foolish of my friends can do it. While walking along the Strand, I carefully observed the flow of the traffic and the drivers' faces, and I reflected that

A B C

if brainwork were required in order to drive a car, few of these people would be driving. Consequently, I arranged to take a course of lessons and possessed myself of a book, *Motoring Without Trouble: The Owner-Driver's A B C*, which I took home. I spent the evening reading it—reading and re-reading and re-re-reading such sentences as: ‘To bring this about the piston is connected with a cranked shaft, the crank-pin of which is out of line with the shaft itself, by means of a connecting-rod, K, Fig. 5. The connecting-rod is hinged to the piston by the gudgeon-pin or wrist-pin bearing, L, Fig. 5, and to the crank-pin by the big-end bearing, M, Fig. 5,’ and ‘The front end of the crankshaft is fitted with a pinion-wheel, O, Fig. 5—a toothed wheel—and the meshes with a gear-wheel attached to the end of the camshaft, P, Fig. 5, the latter being double the size of the former so that its speed is only one-half that of the crankshaft.’ At the end of three hours’ reading my brain was going round like a catherine-wheel. As I lay in bed that night, camshafts and crankshafts kept revolving in my head, making a noise like a Grand National of milk-carts, and I began to wonder whether I was going to find the A B C of motoring quite so easy as it had seemed in the Strand.

My doubts increased when on the following day I went for my first lesson and was taken into a large room full of what looked like the

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dead bodies of motor-cars—arms, legs, torsos, etc.—awaiting the dissecting knife. My instructor took me from part to part, explaining everything, and at intervals I nodded to pretend that I understood. But at the end of it all I confess I was still as incapable of telling the difference between a camshaft and a crankshaft as of solving the riddle of the Sphinx.

The second lesson took place at half-past five in the darkness of a wet, gloomy winter afternoon. The instructor, a smallish man with dreaming eyes but with a face a little thin and drawn as a result of sitting too often in a motor-car driven by people who did not know how to drive, took me to a car and I got in beside him. He showed me this pedal and that, and instructed me hurriedly in the changing of gears and in the use of the hand-brake, and we bore off down a street along which buses, lorries and taxis and cars were running; but I did not mind that since he was driving. He drew up suddenly at the kerb, however, and said: 'Now, you take the wheel.' I changed places, caught the wheel at seven o'clock and five o'clock as advised in the books, and held on to it as though I were holding in a runaway horse. 'Hold it lightly,' he said, and I pretended to do so, though I did not really trust the car. 'Now,' he said, 'put your foot on the self-starter.' I did so, producing a curious buzzing noise. 'Now the accelerator.' And, having read in a book

that the accelerator was the danger-spot on a car, I approached it with my foot as carefully as if it had been red-hot. Then his instructions seemed to come in a quick rush—‘Disengage clutch, number one gear, hand-brake off, accelerator’—so that my brain swam in incomprehension; but, rather than disappoint him, I struck out desperately with hands and feet at everything I could reach. The car gave a start, and seemed to me to be trying to jump forwards and backwards at the same time. Then it came to a sudden and silent standstill. The instructor looked a little sad, told me everything all over again, and again I aimed desperately like a blind and tormented octopus at any part of the car I could seize or kick, with the same result as before. ‘When I said disengage the clutch,’ cried the instructor, his patience giving way, ‘you did exactly the opposite.’ ‘I thought you meant the opposite,’ I replied with equal impatience; ‘naturally, I thought disengaging the clutch meant taking my foot off it.’

He groaned. We made a third start, and this time, by good fortune, I must have got both feet and hands on the right parts of the machinery, for the car moved off slowly along the kerb. ‘A little to the right,’ he said, and I turned the wheel hard to the left as though it were the helm of a rowing-boat, till with a shout he seized it and turned the car out into the road again just in time to save a lamp-post. ‘Always

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turn the wheel in the direction in which you want to go,' he told me with a scared look as we set off again. Then, after we had crawled a dozen yards, he said, 'Keep a little to the right.' I was determined not to make a mistake this time, and twisted the wheel rapidly round to the right as far as it would go. We should certainly have caught the nose of a bus flying past us if he had not sprung at the wheel and twisted it rapidly back again in the opposite direction. 'My dear sir,' he explained, despairingly, 'the gentlest touch does it.' We set off again, and steering certainly seemed easier than I had expected. The car, indeed, seemed to steer itself so long as I left it alone. We were getting along smoothly, and I was beginning to feel so vain of my skill as a driver that I only wished my friends were on the footpath to see me when he said: 'Now, we'll go gently up to second.' He had instructed me about that, and I was in such a state of elation that I felt I could make the change blindfold. I felt for the clutch-pedal and the accelerator with my feet, pressed them down as far as they would go, stooped down and caught the gear-lever, and dragged it into place with a loud ripping noise. I suppose I must have given the steering-wheel a turn as I stooped, for the car shot off like a hare across the road and would inevitably have dashed into a motor-lorry if the instructor had not seized the wheel and, with an energy that seemed like

A B C

unspoken profanity, swung the car back into safety.

We were getting on a little better again when he said to me, 'A little to the right.' I made gently for the middle of the road, scarcely touching the accelerator for fear the car should perform any more of its antics, and was driving so cautiously that I was astonished when a man in a passing horse-van began shouting what I took to be insulting epithets. Strange as it may seem, however, it was not at me he was shouting ; he was merely informing us that our rear-light had gone out. It had gone out beyond repair, indeed. 'Hard luck,' said the instructor. 'Hard luck,' I agreed. But it is possible that for both of us there was a certain element of relief in the knowledge that the day's lesson was now necessarily over and that we had to return to the security of the garage.

As for the third lesson, let us draw a veil over it. At the end of it, I spoke sympathetically to the instructor, as one nerve-shattered man to another, saying : ' You must feel tired after a day of this sort of thing.' ' To-day,' he said in a soft, dreamy voice, ' I have had what I call all my dud pupils.' He drew in a lungful of cigarette-smoke and slowly blew it out. ' A pack of hoboes ! ' he said wearily. ' You might as well try to hammer sense into the back of a bus with a mallet.'

He said it with the air of a man politely excluding me from the category. But I wonder.

II. The Kitten

EVERY wise man loves his own cat, but even the foolish love other people's kittens. All the cats that one has loved best have been full-grown—they have been animals whose careers one has followed almost from the cradle to the grave—and yet one feels a temporary affection for any kitten in the world as it scurries under the sofa, protrudes a questing head from beneath the valance as though the room were an unexplored African jungle, reaches out a paw and withdraws suddenly into the darkness, throws itself on its back and engages in a sham fight with the valance, and, righting itself, bolts with demons pursuing it to the folds of the curtain at the window. Most of our affections are the result of long associations, but every one who sees a kitten falls in love at first sight. I suppose we are sentimental in our attitude to all young animals—foals, calves, pigs a month old, chickens, and ducklings. Even the psychoanalysts cannot persuade us that these pretty neophytes are as gross and dull as the elders of their species. A pig has at least a few weeks of innocence before it becomes a pig in the full sense of the word, and, if a chicken is not pure, then there is nothing pure on earth. At the same time, I think our affection for kittens is

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based on something else besides that vague sentiment of kindness we all feel in the presence of infancy and innocence. I am as fond of chickens as anyone, but there is a monotony in their behaviour that makes it impossible to watch them with interest for more than a short period. I am a sworn admirer of calves, but calves, despite the menus in the restaurants, have no brains and lack initiative. Every kitten, almost as soon as it has emerged from the primal darkness, becomes (save at meal hours) an independent being, able to amuse itself like a child, inventive, adventurous, eager.

It is the only animal that enjoys looking at things for the sheer pleasure of seeing them moving. Dangle a string before the eyes of a duckling, and, if there is no food at the end of it, it will show no interest. Throw a paper ball along the ground in presence of a young pig, and it will find it duller than *Euphues*. A puppy, to be sure, will run after a ball, but I do not think either a foal or a calf will, and even a puppy lacks the all-embracing curiosity of a kitten. A kitten alone among the animals enjoys the use of its eyes to the full. Take it into the garden, and it starts with excitement at the shadow of a cabbage-butterfly passing over the grass. The rose-leaf stirring in the wind after the rain draws it like a magnet, and it approaches it stealthily, its eyes a-glitter with interest, and touches it tentatively with its paw,

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as though everything that moved must be investigated. It creeps among the godetias flattened by the rain, and, as each plant with the removal of its foot jumps upwards and swings like a pendulum, the kitten stays to look and wonder and perhaps to box timorously the vacillating flower. It cannot move a step in the garden without seeing something else moving—a privet-leaf, a blade of grass, a bird on the railings. If it settles down to sleep on the flagged path, an ant appears out of a crack and hurries earnestly on its errand, and the kitten sits up, with its ears forward and its head cocked sideways, studying the moving apparition, approaching it with a careful paw, backing from the ant as it returns as from an incoming tide, following the ant cautiously till it has reached the crack and putting its foot swiftly on the crack as the ant disappears, raising its foot hurriedly from the crack as the ant re-emerges, and never taking its eyes off the insect till it sees its mother's tail moving and stalks this as a still better plaything. In a few months it will be only a cat and will no longer be interested in the traffic of ants, refusing to bestir itself for anything smaller than a moth. To-day, even an ant is something that moves and is therefore worth looking at. It is a point of view that kittens share with the wisest—or, at least, the happiest—of mankind.

Perhaps it is because we have at our best

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great deal in common with kittens that we cannot help liking them. We owe so much of our happiness to our alertness of observation that we praise an extreme form of the same characteristic in the kitten. We, too, were born with a passion for looking at everything that moves. The baby, taken into its father's bed before breakfast, notices the movement of the eyelids over the eyes, stares in solemn wonder, and attempts to put its finger into an eye that is the scene of such miracles. One day, it will grow up and cease even to notice the winking of eyelids, unless it is a man of genius ; but to-day, like all babies, it has a genius of observation denied to most of its elders. All through its childhood it retains this genius in however decreasing measure. In the nursery it can watch a rain-drop coursing down the window-pane as though it were the first rain-drop that had appeared in the world. It may be that all the secrets of life are contained in a single rain-drop ; the child alone among us looks at it as though this might be so. As it grows older, the tiniest and muddiest rill of water holds it fascinated. It can be happy hour after hour standing on a bridge and throwing grasses or pieces of stick into the stream, and hurrying to the other side of the bridge to see them moving downstream on the moving surface of the water. All wheels in motion give it pleasure. There is much satisfaction to be got

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from observing the slow stumble of cart-wheels along an old country road, and the huge wheel of a water-mill is a spectacle to keep a child late for dinner. The swinging of the pendulum of a clock and the halting movement of the second-hand are something at which to stand and stare, and the never-resting flames of the fire make even an unimaginative child imaginative.

The superiority of the child to the grown man in observation is shown in the greater interest it takes in the movements of such creatures as snails and caterpillars. I never knew a grown man who loved snails so much that he attempted to organize races between snails ; but I have met a boy who did this, though not with great success. As for caterpillars, the majority of men and women regard them as little better than vermin : the child, however, sees in the caterpillar something that moves, however wrigglingly, and can watch its progress along a stalk with as much patience as the caterpillar's own. Many children, one has to admit, are afraid of spiders, earwigs, beetles and mice, but I do not believe this fear is natural. Here the poison of terror has been instilled into their ears by parents and nurses. The child, I am sure, if left to itself, would make friends with earwigs ¹ and would shout with joy at the sight of a mouse running across the floor. There is no

¹ But see p. 66.

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living creature, not even a house-fly, that does not, as it moves, interest the young human being.

It was surely no accident that led mankind to choose a ball—the most easily moved of all things—as the instrument of so many of its games. Here is something which, as it is kicked or struck backwards and forwards, any healthy-blooded man can watch as eagerly as Galileo watched the heavenly bodies through his telescope. And, if a philosopher objected to his taking such extravagant pleasure in watching a tennis-ball or a cricket-ball or a football, he could only echo Galileo's noble remark on the loveliest of the planets, *Eppur si muove*. Many fine things have been said in praise of the earth, but none finer than that. Here, too, you have half the secret of the moon's beauty. A moon that stood eternally still in the same place—that never, cautious as a thief, rose behind the hills or sped in its crescent infancy along the west after the setting sun—would be no more than an arc-lamp in the sky, and we should cease to notice its presence or, at least, its loveliness. The very stars move in procession, and, though we praise the North Star because it is fixed, we should praise it less if all the stars were fixed. Whether the sun is fixed or not I do not know ; at least, it behaves as though it were not. Had it been so, Joshua doubtless would have made it move—a finer miracle than that he performed.

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As for our earth, which, with all its faults, is a kind of ball, if it were to cease to move, whole civilizations would perish. Hence, it is no wonder that ball-games play so important a part in the more intelligent continents. The ball is the symbol of everything that keeps us alive on a mobile earth under a mobile sun.

The child and the kitten are born with an instinctive sense of these things. They could not explain their love of everything that moves, but we can explain it for them. And, occasionally, we can even recapture something of their wise pleasures. We, too, know that the fall of a single leaf on a still autumn day can take our eyes from a book and make us forget the death of Caesar. That solitary leaf spiralling to the ground seems to have more life in it for the moment than all the rest of the visible world. A hedgehog crackling its way out of the undergrowth on a soundless night compels us to watch it as though the rest of creation were merely a setting for this one creature. One can remember the scene in which a snake fluctuated sideways into the secrecy of the brambles, long after one has forgotten the Greek conjugations. As for ants, when they go about their business, they can bring interest even into the flat world of flagstones. Those great bladders that they hoist out of the cracks, and tug and pull across the stones, with other ants eager to help arriving and pushing in the opposite direction, are to me

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a mystery, but I can sit beside the kitten and watch them as though I were watching the building of the Pyramids. The ant has, so far as I know, no real virtue except that it moves, and no one would think of keeping a dead ant in a glass case ; but while it moves it is as interesting as a star. The spider, again, while it remains still on the ceiling, is uninteresting except to those who fear it : let it begin to lower itself on its thread, however, and then return to the ceiling to fight its own shadow cast by the electric light, and, whether you are reading Shakespeare or a detective story, you can read no more for half an hour. Thus, at least, it was with me the other night when a spider suddenly began fighting its shadow. It chased the shadow across the ceiling, fought it leg by leg, dropped an inch and shook itself like an angry golliwog, returned to the fight, suddenly lowered itself to the floor with arms outspread like a ballet-dancer let down from the flies of a theatre, lay on its back and climbed up its thread to the ceiling again, grappled with its shadow, and so on till it was time for bed. I forget what the book was that I was reading, but I do not forget the spider. I could not have taken my eyes off him to read about Cleopatra. And, as I went to bed, I reflected : ‘ How happy is the kitten that has nothing to do but watch such things all day ! ’

III. In Praise of Mistakes ♪ ♪

THERE has been a heavy shower of letters in *The Times* about the mistakes made by famous novelists. Correspondents have written to the Editor pointing out such things as that Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith blundered in making one of her characters send his son to school from Kent to Shrewsbury in the early eighteenth century ; that Walter Besant erred in making the hero of one of his stories dig for oil with a spade and dig triumphantly ; that William Le Queux was guilty of a geographical lie in referring to the ' snow-crowned crest ' of a hill two thousand feet high in the tropics ; that some other novelist erroneously described the daughter of a rural dean as having ' been brought up in the quiet seclusion of the Deanery ' ; that a writer of detective stories misrepresented ' the relative positions of a chief constable and an inspector of the C.I.D.', and so on, and so on. The correspondence was extremely interesting, but, as one read it, one became more and more astonished at the weakness of the case made out against the novelists by the intelligentsia of the nation. Even the most pugnacious lawyer, if so poor a case had been put into his hands, would have advised his client not to bring it into court. At the end of the indictment the

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novelist might triumphantly have replied to his accusers in the words of Lord Clive : ‘ By God, Mr. Chairman, at this moment I stand astonished at my own moderation.’ For if this is the worst that can be said against novelists they must be wizards of accuracy compared with such professed dealers in facts as biographers and historians.

I confess I am myself so nervous a lover of accuracy that, when I have written an article, I consult the encyclopaedia to make sure that I have not erred on some such matter as the sun’s rising in the east or the Pole Star’s not being one of the planets. Often, awaking out of a dream in the small hours, I have broken into a sweat of fear lest, in an article that had already gone to press, I had put some wretched poet that nobody ever reads into the wrong century. Worst of all, having described some church ceremony, and having necessarily used such words as nave, transept, chancel, choir, chasuble, cope, alb and clerestory, I pass wakeful hours in the apprehension that I may have placed the clerestory round a bishop’s shoulders or referred to an alb as a kind of hat. These fears, I admit, are absurd. Nobody but a bigot cares twopence what a clerestory is, but everybody likes to see the word in print, and ‘ chasuble ’ is as impressive a word in a sentence whether the writer or the reader thinks it is a large silver cup—I like to think of it as a cup—or a piece of clothing.

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There are a great many words that mean nothing to the ordinary reader and that yet everybody reads with pleasure—words that we love not for their sense but for their appeal to our senses. Who ever cares whether a poet is accurate or not when he uses the word ‘chrysoprase’ or ‘beryl’ or ‘sardonyx’ or ‘chalcedony’? Yet who that has ever been young has not admired these words though they conveyed nothing except a blur of beauty to his intelligence? The most incompetent jeweller’s assistant in the world could probably correct a thousand errors in the poets in their references to precious stones, just as the editor of the *Tailor and Cutter* once a year exposes the errors of Mr. Augustus John, Sir William Orpen and the most eminent painters of our time in the gents’ suitings with which they clothe their sitters. But the poet, with all his mistakes, is telling us something that the jeweller’s assistant with all his accuracy cannot tell us. As one grows older, no doubt, one cares less for the rarer kind of jewellery in poetry. Still, so long as one likes the sound of ‘chrysoberyl’, one does not really care whether a poet who uses the word knows what a chrysoberyl is or not.

The truth is, the only fatal error in a writer is to be uninteresting. Even the historian will be forgiven all other errors but that. The inaccuracies of Froude have been laughed at for three generations, but we can still read him

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more easily than we can read most of the historians who have corrected him. I do not wish to suggest that a writer need be at no pains to verify his facts. That would obviously be a vile doctrine, and, if it were acted upon, would make the writing of history a frivolous pursuit. At the same time, we instinctively concede to every writer a margin of error, and we no more expect him to be perfect in his information than in his character. There have been few writers who have not perpetrated errors that had to be amended by their editors. Shakespeare blundered in chronology and geography, Scott made the sun rise on the wrong side of the world, Lamb and Hazlitt continually misquoted the poets they loved. Was there not a famous novelist who, in describing a University boat-race, wrote of the stroke of one of the boats : ' All rowed fast, but none rowed so fast as he ' ? Only a few years ago an able woman novelist gave us a picture of an Association football-match in which one of the characters picked up the ball and scored a try. I doubt, however, if she lost a single reader in consequence. No one read her books for information about football, and those who knew better than she read her novel with all the more pleasure because they discovered that on one point at least they were her superiors.

That, perhaps, is the chief value of error in any kind of literature—that it makes the reader

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temporarily feel that he is an inch taller than the writer. Dr. Johnson endeared himself to posterity by making blunders in a book where blunders, one would have said, are least pardonable—in a dictionary. His accurate definitions are now of interest only to a few scholars; his mistakes are still a source of delight to a multitude of readers. There is more joy in earth over one error discovered in a good writer than over a hundred impeccable pages. If a dryasdust scholar suddenly discovered that there were no Moors in Venice at the time of Othello, with what enthusiasm he would write to *The Times* about it! Othello's noblest lines would never have quickened his pulses as the proof that Shakespeare had made a mistake would. Of all the letters that appear in the newspapers there are few written with such spiritual joy as those that point out a mistake. The true error-hunter is a man who searches for error as men search for gold during a gold-rush. His eureka's are uttered not over immortal phrases but over some tiny lapse in geography, ornithology, or even grammar. The poets have given as much pleasure by writing inaccurately about birds as by writing beautifully about them. What ornithologist has not enjoyed all those lines in which the poets make the female bird sing? Or, at least, what ornithologist did not enjoy those lines till yesterday? Now, unhappily, various writers have begun to produce evidence

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suggesting that in several species the female bird as well as the male does sing. I do not know whether this theory is true or not, but, if it is, the poets will now derive as much pleasure from the mistakes of the ornithologists as the ornithologists once derived from the mistakes of the poets.

All comedy probably arises from our enjoyment of other people's mistakes. If we did not make mistakes there would be nothing in the world to laugh at. Hence, if we regard laughter as a blessing we should pay a tribute to error. In the history of the world the man who makes mistakes has never been sufficiently appreciated. For all the mirth he has given us we have repaid him with the basest ingratitude. Of this ingratitude you will find evidence if you turn to *Punch* and look carefully at its admirable weekly collection of the errors of journalists and printers. Not long ago, it was *Punch's* custom to give the name of the paper from which the misprint or mis-statement quoted was taken, and you would imagine that any journalist or printer would have felt honoured at having been singled out as one who had added to the gaiety of the most heavily-taxed of the nations. But it was otherwise. Protests—so, at least, I have heard—poured into the *Punch* office from journalists and printers who were threatened with dismissal or reprimanded because their casual blunders had been trumpeted to all the world as treasures.

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Hence, in *Punch* to-day the source of a misprint is never given, and we are told vaguely that it comes from a 'morning paper', a 'Sunday paper', or an 'Irish paper'. In a world that rightly appraised error, the newspapers would protest against this as an attempt to rob them of the credit of having increased human happiness. If the *Oban Times* contains a good misprint why should the nation not be allowed to applaud it? If a journalist on the *Berkhamsted Eagle* refers to 'The Boy Stood on the Burning Deck' as 'Wordsworth's immortal lyric', why should his fame be obscured by a dull reference to a 'Hertfordshire paper'? So highly do I esteem misprints that if I were editor of a paper I should see to it that there was a worthy misprint in every number, if not on every page. I should also gratify my readers by misquoting the poets, putting towns in the wrong counties, confusing Darius and Xerxes, and inserting a daily anachronism. I am sure the paper would sell in millions, since it would give every reader a daily flush of superiority, a daily chuckle of delight in his own wisdom and a daily reason for writing a letter to the editor. And I should certainly give a post on my staff to the journalist, quoted in *Punch*, who recently began an article: 'The sting of the serpent is in its tail, we are told.'

The newspapers nowadays are full of accurate articles on natural history, but I confess, as an

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ordinary reader, no other sentence I have read about natural history has for a long time given me so much pleasure as this quiet mis-statement. The serpent, thus inaccurately represented, becomes a fabulous creature, wonderful as a Dragon, breathing comedy. And, everywhere we look, we find similar evidence of the importance of error. The pedantically accurate schoolboy does not interest us as he repeats like a parrot the dull fact that William the Conqueror won the Battle of Hastings, but a boy capable of making the error of attributing the victory to William of Orange immediately becomes a person of national importance, and he is quoted in a thousand papers with Prime Ministers and Mr. Shaw. Hence it seems to me it is not only human but wise to err. The novelists need not be perturbed by being accused of blundering. My own conviction is that they do not blunder half enough. We shall never have a novelist of the magnitude of Shakespeare till we have a novelist who can make blunders of the same magnitude as Shakespeare's.

IV. The Grudge

IT was a few days before Christmas. Two men, one old, one middle-aged, sat round the fire-place of the saloon bar, smoking and silent. 'Well,' said the barman, a little bald bright-eyed fellow, 'got all your Christmas presents yet? Bought the 'olly, and the mistletoe, and the turkey, and the Christmas tree, and the presents for the wife and kiddies, and the——' He was a man who obviously hated silence, and, merely for the sake of saying something, he would have continued the list of Christmas purchases indefinitely if the old man had not interrupted him. 'No,' he thundered, as far as it is possible to thunder with a pipe in one's mouth and from a mouth concealed in a vast growth of moustache and beard; 'thank Gawd, I've bought nothing.' The middle-aged man nodded agreement. 'And,' added the old man bitterly, 'don't mean to, either.' The middle-aged man, sandy-haired and wizened, looked as if he were going to open his mouth. 'Christmas presents!' jeered the old man, refusing to make way for him; 'the papers are all full of Christmas shopping, and wot does it all mean? It means that the shopkeepers are trying to get rid of their goods. The 'ole thing's a stunt. Christmas—well, it's supposed to commemorate

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the birth of Christ. A lot the shopkeepers care about the birth of Christ! The 'ole thing's commercialized. "Give a present to Mother". "Give a present to Baby". Gawd, the 'ypocrisy of it all makes me sick.' The middle-aged man was shaking his forefinger eagerly and at last succeeded in getting a word in. 'That's wot I say. This Christmas business is all give, give, give, and you and me's supposed to do the giving. I was reck'neen up the other day, and, in the last twenty years, apart from what I've got from the firm, for every quid I've spent on Christmas presents, I 'aven't 'ad a bob's worth in return. Everybody's willin' to take, and nobody wants to give. They'll take your quid, and won't give you as much as a bloomeen bob for it. Well, I'm not playeen any more. If I spend five shillings on presents this Christmas, that'll be the whole of it, and I'll think myself lucky if somebody gives *me* a packet of gaspers.' 'And I,' growled the old man, 'won't spend a penny. The 'ole thing's gone rotten, and 'as no more to do with the birth of Christ than my 'at.'

'Well,' said the barman, shocked but anxious to be obliging, 'there's probably something in wot you say. Shopkeepers—well, shopkeepers are shopkeepers, you know, and you can't expect 'em to forgit it.' 'That's wot I complain about,' the old man broke in irascibly; 'the 'ole thing's been commercialized from top to bottom.'

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‘Still,’ the barman persisted with his argument, smiling ingratiatingly ; ‘people like to be ‘appy——’ ‘‘Appy!’ repeated the sandy-haired man in a voice of loathing. ‘And any’ow,’ continued the barman, ‘Christmas is Christmas, don’t you think? And the young people like it.’ ‘Huph,’ said the old man; ‘a bright lot of young people we’ve got nowadays.’ ‘Huph,’ agreed the sandy-haired man. ‘Oh!’ continued the old man, ‘they know a lot about a lotta things. They know all about painteen and powdereen, and that’s about all of it. *I* know ‘em. I’ve got daughters and grand-daughters, and, to listen to ‘em talkeen, you’d see they think they know everything. You saw that case of the woman and the fur coat in the newspapers? *She* knew it was—wot was it?—Canadian mink. Oh! *she* knew. *She* knew the price all right. And I ‘aven’t a daughter or grand-daughter ‘oo isn’t the same. They know the price of everything and the value of nothing.’ ‘Oh, a fat lot *they* know,’ crooned the sandy-haired man, wagging his head appreciatively. ‘They know nothing,’ the old man contradicted himself violently, ‘nothing at all, and yet they think they know more’n you and me and the lot of us put together. I’ll give you an instance that ‘appened to me the other day. I bought a new pipe and took it ‘ome with me, and, of course, they all noticed it and began saying: “ ‘Ullo, that’s a nice new

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pipe. That must have cost you a bit of money." " 'Ow much do you think ? " I says to 'em, just to try 'em. " Oh ", says one of 'em, " you can't get a pipe like that for less than three and sixpence ". " Oh ", says another, " it cost more'n that. It cost five and six, if it cost a penny ". ' The old man laughed derisively and took a long swig from his tankard. ' Well,' he resumed, ' wot I 'ad paid for the pipe was a tanner. But *they* knew. *They* knew. Gawd Almighty, they know everything. And that's only one instance. I could give you *thousands*.'

I could not wait to hear the thousands of examples of the ignorant egotism of the younger generations, and even the barman slipped away to another part of the bar in order to escape from the cloud of pessimism that seemed to threaten his Christmas cheeriness. I confess I myself was not unduly depressed : there was something so wholehearted in the loathing of the two men for Christmas and youth and everything that makes human beings happy except beer that I felt almost elated by it. The curmudgeon, no doubt, is an unpleasant person in the home, but, as a decoration, he is not without his points. Men have always been entertained by a good hater, and almost anyone can become amusing merely by denouncing Scotsmen or Socialists or Americans or capitalists or contemporary authors or dead ones. We enjoy vituperation even when we do not

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agree with it. Nothing has impaired the gaiety of the London Press, even in the eyes of Labour and Liberal readers, more than the fact that, owing to Ireland's new status, abuse of the Irish has dropped out of fashion. During the worst of the troubles of recent years, the English paper that was read with the most eager enjoyment by Irishmen was the paper that abused them most exuberantly. It is as though exuberance took the sting out of hatred. It uses venom in order to produce a caricature, and all men who are even moderately wise enjoy caricature. When, in the days of the Lloyd-George Budget, a Conservative Peer declared that Mr. Lloyd George was the sort of man who would steal the penny out of a blind beggar's tin, indignation among Mr. Lloyd George's friends was lost in laughter, since everybody recognized that the Peer's hatred of the land tax had taken a burlesque form and had emerged as a joke. Vituperation, indeed, is nearly always comic. The hatred that does not amuse us is a cold hatred, economical of words. Half the people who denounce their fellow-creatures are indulging in play of the imagination, and, as we listen to them, we take part in their game. Denunciation is largely a kind of 'ragging' in which the missiles used are words. We may protest against 'ragging', but there is a part of our natures that enjoys seeing things thrown about

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for the sake of throwing things about, and that relishes the notion of things being smashed, whether windows or reputations. This sense of fun may be primitive, but without it we should not be able to enjoy the stories of Mr. P. G. Wodehouse.

At the same time, hatred—even exuberant hatred—is not always entertaining. In order to be entertaining it must, I imagine, be the hatred of a man who is more or less enjoying himself. The hatred of a man who gets no relief from his hatred makes us shudder. I came on an example of this kind of hatred not long ago, while I was waiting for a 'bus at the bottom of Southampton Row. A blind man was feeling his way with his stick along the pavement, and, before I could reach him, had walked into a lamp. I took him by the arm and led him into safety, but instead of thanking me he burst into a volume of blasphemous imprecations against Londoners who would do nothing to help a blind man and who would allow him to run into lamp-posts and trees. He called loudly on God to curse them as swine and worse. 'Ha,' he said bitterly, 'a lot of people talk against the Germans. The only fault I find with the Germans is that they didn't do their work properly when they were sending their Zeppelins over London. I only hope to God that, if there's ever another war, the Germans'll send over Zeppelins and aeroplanes in thousands and

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blow London to Hell. What do these people care about me, and why should I care about them? I wish to God the Germans would come and teach some of them what suffering means. The swine! the swine!' he said. 'I'd be glad if they were all lying dead.' If he had not been blind, his detestation of his fellow-creatures would not have seemed so horrible. As it was, his frenzy seemed like an addition to his suffering, and to be a disease of the soul added to the blindness of his eyes. One might imagine that hatred is natural enough in a man suffering from some such incapacity as his, but, in fact, it is not so. The blind are above most men patient and grateful. No voices could be gentler than those of the blind men who sit or stand on the footwalks, with little expectant tins round their necks. I pass one of them every day who sits through the coldest east wind with his feet on a small square of wood, and who, if you drop even a penny into his tin, and if a blizzard is not actually blowing, calls out: 'Thank you. Good mawning, good mawning. Beautiful day. Thank you.' Often, when I pass him, he is sitting with his hands in his pockets and his feet drumming on the wood, and is whistling like a bird. Well, perhaps not like a bird, for he does not whistle very well, but he whistles as no man with a deep grudge against life could whistle. I am sure that he is positively happier than the old man who will

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not spend a penny on Christmas presents, or than the sandy-haired man who feels so bitterly that he has always been giving Christmas presents to other people and that nobody has ever given an adequate Christmas present to him. Probably both these men enjoy their grudges, but the blind man enjoys a life free from grudges.

The odd thing is that most of us, if we were given our choice between being the old man with the daughters and grand-daughters who know everything, and the blind man, would unhesitatingly choose to be the old man. I almost certainly should. We are all but unteachable either by philosophy or by experience. We know that no man is happy till he is free from grudgingness, but that knowledge would not influence our choice. Possibly, however, I have wronged the old man. It may be that generosity is his secret vice, and that, having indulged in this braggadocio of miserliness, he will go out and buy clandestine Christmas presents for his daughters and grand-daughters. But I do not think the sandy-haired man will. If you want to get a present from the sandy-haired man this year, I think you will have to send him a present first—and a good one.

HAVING mastered the A B C of driving a car, we come to the letter D. D, as you know, is for Damnable, Danger, Death, Double Declutch, Dismay, Don't, Dolt, Dunderhead, and Dziggetai, the wild ass of Central Asia. E is for Ease, Ecstasy, Expert. I hope to get as far as this in the alphabet some day, but I am still, I confess, at D. Do I enjoy driving? Honestly, I do not know. A few weeks ago I thought, 'How pleasant to go out into the country, and feed one's eyes on the beauties of field and wood and hill!' Well, I have driven into the country several times, and so far I have seen nothing but the surface of the road a few yards ahead, kerbstones, red triangles, torches, A.A. men, and cross-roads. Some day I may write a book called *The Cross-roads of England*. They are the only part of the landscape of which I have recently had any experience. And to my mind they are an infernal nuisance. Never does the hand of the speedometer creep round to a point that seems to make life worth living, even on an arterial road, but the sign of a cross-road catches the eye and one has to slow down out of charity to possible fools. The only pleasure I obtain from them is the pleasure of recognition. 'Ah,' says the man at my side,

' this is the cross-roads where you lost your engine twice. Do you remember how the A.A. man laughed ? ' or ' This is the corner you took at thirty miles an hour. Lucky nothing was coming the other way, or we should have had a crash,' or ' Now we're coming to the hill where that chap shouted at you for not speeding up or letting him pass.' There is, indeed, scarcely a road on which I travel that is not made more real to me by some little piece of history. Sometimes I have not known why the people were shouting, but my companion and I both remember the places at which they shouted.

London streets, too, are becoming as rich in memories as arterial roads and country lanes. The Bayswater Road will always seem beautiful to me because of the great red face that I saw framed in the back window of a saloon-car, beetroot-coloured with maledictions that, alas ! I could not hear. I had heard the horn of the man's car blowing for a long time behind me, but I was too busy saving the lives of pedestrians to attend to it, and I might have been a pedestrian myself from the look of hatred he cast back at me. If I go on driving I must get a piece of coral and wear it as a charm against the Evil Eye. The man who teaches me, being of an excitable disposition, and also pathetically loyal to my driving, resents the misbehaviour of these blasphemers in saloon-cars, and it is as much as I can do to keep him from standing up

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in the car and shaking his fist at them. As it is, he makes gestures of defiance and disgust from his seat and mutters bitter ironies that, alas ! are wasted on their objects. For the most part, however, he is too busy shouting directions to me to have much breath to waste on my rivals. 'Keep out, keep out,' he cries, 'you were nearly into the 'bus that time.' 'Nonsense,' I reply, 'I had at least an inch to spare.' 'Now, slow down,' he says, 'the policeman's holding up his hand. Slower, slower,' he all but shrieks ; 'you'll be into him.' 'Not a bit of it,' I answer him. 'My foot's on the brake all right.' 'Now get ready to go into second. Now speed up. Away with it. Away with it. Now third. Now top. You must learn to get away faster, or you'll hold up the traffic. Don't worry about the dog. It'll look after itself. Turn round the next corner. Woa ! Woa ! You mustn't go round a corner like that. If a bobby had seen you, you might have got into trouble. Take care of that nursemaid. Slower ! Slower ! You missed her all right. Now you're coming to a hill. Speed up. Speed up. Tread on it. Tread on it. Give her plenty of gas. That man's a fool coming out of a side street like that. If you hadn't kept your head there would have been a smash. Now second. Away with it. Now third. Now top. You must let that clutch in easier. Here's another traffic block. Slower ! Slower ! You really will get into

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trouble with the police some day if you don't begin to slow down sooner. Look at that poor bobby's face. He looks as if he had seen a ghost.' 'But,' I protest, 'I have never run into anything yet except a gate.' 'Now second,' he cries. 'Away with it. Quicker! Quicker! Now third. Now top.' And so on, till my left leg and arm are aching with declutching and changing gears.

I had not, I may say, realized that all this business of changing gears was necessary when I consented to learn to drive. If I had, I should have remained a pedestrian for life. Knowing nothing of machinery, I had a notion that the whole art of driving consisted in avoiding objects, and that if one knew how to use the steering wheel and the brake, one would know enough to enable one to drive from London to Land's End. I have found, on the contrary, that, while driving along Oxford Street, I have to work as hard as a stoker, and that gear-changing involves me in more physical exercise than I have ever voluntarily taken in my life. Nor can I forget it even when I turn out the lamp and try to go to sleep. As I lie in bed the muscles of my left leg and arm keep twitching as they take part in imaginary gear changes, and the horrid music of 'Now second. Now third. Now top. Tread on it. Tread on it', continues to rattle in my brain. Peace descends on me only when I imagine myself on that long

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arterial road on which for the first time I experienced the joy of seeing the speedometer pointing to forty miles an hour. Particularly sweet was the little bump on the downhill road at which the car rose like a jumping greyhound. That was not mere driving : it was flight like a swallow's. If only one could do that sort of thing in Oxford Street ! But, at thought of Oxford Street, the gears begin changing again in my brain, and the ' Now second ' symphony resumes its cacophonous iterations.

Yet even in Oxford Street I have one happy memory. It is a memory of angry lorry-drivers shouting. They were shouting behind me, and apparently shouting at me. My companion stood up in the car to look round at them, and, knowing his excitable nature, I was afraid that he was going to take part in the shouting. ' For Heaven's sake, don't answer them,' I said to him, for the possibility of being mixed up in a blasphemy contest made my blood run cold. It is my policy, when I hear shouting from a lorry, to look neither to the right nor to the left, and, so far as is possible, to wear the appearance of a waxwork figure. ' It's all right,' chuckled my companion, ' they began by cursing you for not letting them past, but now they're cursing each other. They've been racing, and nearly had a collision, and now they're at it hammer and tongs.' Gladly would I have paid a shilling a word to hear what they were saying,

now that I knew that they were not saying it about me. But the noise of London traffic reduces the eloquence of lorry-drivers to the level of the inarticulate roars of sea-lions and of faces made by elephants. Why people shout most loudly in circumstances in which their shouts are most inaudible it is difficult to say. One would imagine that people who wish to express their opinions of each other in the noise of motor traffic would, if they had any sense, imitate the tic-tac men at race-meetings, and learn to converse by waving their arms, lifting the hat by the back of the brim, wagging the hands behind the ears and slapping the chin. The language of Shakespeare is obviously useless for the purpose of conveying one motorist's opinion of another motorist to the other motorist. During the past few weeks I have heard man after man making himself hoarse telling me what he thought about me, and, except from the tone of their voices, which is always the same, I have had no means of knowing whether they were speaking in praise of me or being critical. Not one articulate word has reached my ears. All that I can be sure of is that they are taking notice of me, but whether they are cheering or reviling I can only guess.

On the whole, I think motorists are a patient and good-humoured race. I have had some heavenly smiles from motorists I have missed. But there is one motorist in a thousand—or is it

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in a hundred ?—who would never be tolerated if he were a pedestrian. We do not see pedestrians during the worst of the rush-hours glaring at every other pedestrian as an obstructor of the traffic, or hear them roaring their opinions of each other as they try to pass one another on the pavement. Pedestrians know that a few seconds do not matter. Motorists, who have far more time to spare, behave as though you had robbed them of their watches if you make them lose a second. Pedestrianism seems to make for equability of temper ; motoring for hysteria.

The secret reason of the excitability of motorists is, I imagine, that scarcely any of them know how to drive. Major Segrave estimates that the proportion of motorists who can really drive is about two per cent, and the companion of my drives would, I am sure, put it even lower. Whether in the country or in the town, he comments on most of the other drivers on the road. When he is not saying to me, ' Now second. Away with it,' he is staring at another car and saying : ' A rotten driver,' ' That man can't drive,' ' That fellow's a public danger,' ' *He* ought to be locked up.' Once a day, perhaps, a driver meets with his approval, and he says enthusiastically, ' That's the first good driver I have seen to-day.' To me, whose ears are aching with the objurgations that have been hurled at them, these words of his are

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as honey. I love to hear him say sarcastically, 'A learner,' 'A woman-driver, 'thought so,' or, angrily, 'That man's a fool.' Little by little I hope that I, too, shall learn the language of criticism. Indeed I have begun already. The other day I criticized a policeman at point duty, and when he came towards me threateningly, said quietly to my companion, 'It was his fault.' That, I think, showed a proper spirit. As the policeman hesitated and said nothing, however, my companion explained his hesitation in another way. 'He sees you're only a learner,' he said in a sympathetic tone. Still, I had criticized a policeman for having made the wrong sign, and had given him a look. Anyhow, learner or not, I did not run into the bus.

VI. Brevity : a Hope

IT is announced that Sir Samuel Chapman, M.P., is about to form a society of Members of Parliament, each of whom will pledge himself never to occupy more than fifteen minutes with a speech in the House of Commons. It is evidence of the genuineness of the English passion for liberty that, though Parliamentary institutions have been longer in existence in England than in any other country, no serious attempt has ever yet been made to curtail the liberty of bores, and that Sir Samuel Chapman's proposal itself is not to curtail their liberty but merely to appeal to their better nature.

Most movements to make speeches shorter fail, because most men imagine that, while other people's long speeches are boring, their own are not. There are two opinions of every speech—the opinion of the man who makes it and the opinion of the man who listens to it—and they generally disagree in the most astonishing fashion. Often at a banquet you will see one man standing with a fatuous expression of happiness on his face, as he orates, while all around him are faces expressing only dismay. You would think that it must be more comfortable to sit than to stand, but this is not so when an ordinary human being is making a

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speech. Not, at least, if he enjoys speaking. There is no comfort of chair or lighted cigar or re-filled glass that can make up for the agony of having to listen to the procession of semi-articulate sounds that emerge from a too happy speaker's mouth and go on emerging long after the barometer in one's brain has registered boredom. How that barometer rises as the rhythm of a sentence suggests that the speech is coming to a conclusion ! How it falls with lightning speed as a new sentence begins in the accents of a giant refreshed ! It is strange that this torture of speech-making was never used at the time of the Inquisition. Perhaps even the Inquisitors realized that there are some tortures that are too cruel to be used by Christians. Not all long speeches have the same effect, of course ; if they had, we should long ago have made a long speech a capital offence. But nine out of ten long speeches are undoubtedly a form of torture. You have only to see the glad faces of men escaping home from a banquet to get a measure of the relief that they feel that at last it is all over.

The members of the House of Commons, on the other hand, are in a more fortunate position than the guests at a banquet. They can escape before a speech begins ; they can go out while it is going on ; they can sleep, or carry on a whispered conversation, or even interrupt and be quoted in the newspapers. If sitting through

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all the speeches were compulsory in the House of Commons, who can doubt that a movement to limit all speeches to five minutes would have succeeded long ago? At least, the members would have discovered some means by which they could silence a persistent bore. It is said that, on the eve of the war, a device with this object was invented by a Hungarian Member of Parliament. Every member was to have an instrument before him, by touching which he could silently announce that he had had enough of the speaker of the moment. As soon as twelve members had announced their exhaustion in this fashion, a spring would be released and the bore would disappear through a trap-door. I suspect the instrument of being the invention of a Hungarian comic paper, but it was described in an English newspaper at the time as a seriously-intended device. In the Reichstag an instrument, less humiliating but perhaps equally effective, has meanwhile been installed as a warning to the long-winded, and the Speaker turns up a red light to inform the speech-maker that he must bring his remarks to an end. A similar apparatus has been used even in England. Recently, at the annual dinner of the Tunbridge Wells Chamber of Trade, speakers were warned of the passage of time by a green bulb that shone at the end of four minutes, and by a red light when it was time to sit down. There have been attempts to

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instal a comparable device in the House of Commons, which would at least force a member to realize how long he had been speaking, if it did not force him to stop. But this would not be sufficient if the other members were compelled to listen to the speeches. In that event, there would be an all but unanimous demand for the immediate installation of the Hungarian trap-door.

It may be urged that there is no great need for the prohibition of long speeches by law, since the plague of the long speech is gradually dying out. Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, it is said, was the first eminent statesman who gave the example of never making a long speech when a short one would do ; and the late Lord Oxford, when he was in the House of Commons, pursued the same policy. The duration of speeches in the House of Commons to-day must have dwindled by at least half since the time of Gladstone. Possibly the rise of the penny (or, as it once was, the halfpenny) Press, which refused to devote its columns to verbatim reports of speeches, deserves some of the credit for inducing brevity among Members of Parliament. In the nineteenth century newspapers welcomed a long speech as though it were a crime—which, indeed it is—and I remember thinking nothing of reading a speech on Gladstone's Second Home Rule Bill filling three or four columns. Politics were then as interesting

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as prize-fighting, and, though one might not understand much of what Gladstone was saying, one respected his genius as excitedly as to-day one respects the genius of Tunney. The love of long speeches was in the air as the love of long sermons was in the air in an earlier generation. In the twentieth century few people can understand how happy their ancestors felt in listening to a sermon that lasted an hour and more, and how at the end of a good sermon of this length they were sorry only that it was not longer. The truth is, however, an audience that is passionately interested in theology or politics can scarcely have too much of it. It has a vast capacity for excitement, which grows positively greater as the simple things it wishes to hear are said over and over again. It is like a lover who is never bored with listening so long as he is in love. If we are bored by long sermons and long speeches to-day, it is not only because long speeches and long sermons are dull to an impartial ear, but because we ourselves are dull in certain spheres in which our ancestors were responsive. Some of the novels that excite us will probably appear as dull to our descendants as the long sermons of the seventeenth century seem to us. Perhaps posterity will even prefer the long sermons to the novels.

Whether oratory can still flourish if it is laid down that no speech must last longer than twenty minutes is a question that it is difficult

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to answer. At first one is inclined to answer 'No'. It was not amid surroundings of green and red bulbs, warning them that they must be brief, that Demosthenes, Cicero and Burke won their fame as the master orators of mankind, though Demosthenes did keep his eye on the water-clock. The speeches of Demosthenes and Cicero were exceedingly long ; at least, they seemed exceedingly long to me when I was compelled to read them. Burke thought nothing of inflicting on his fellow-members a speech that fills sixty pages of a modern closely-printed book. Can we imagine such fullness of eloquence compressing itself within the limits of twenty minutes ? It is true that his fellow-members did not enjoy listening to Burke, and fled from the House when he rose, but his position as an orator is supreme in English literature ; and no briefer speaker in English has rivalled him. On the other hand, there are one or two things that make me wonder whether great speeches might not still be made in spite of the tyranny of a time-limit. The great speech of Pericles, reported by Thucydides, is one of the golden speeches of the world, yet (if it was delivered in its present form) it did not occupy more than about half an hour. Shakespeare, again, puts into the mouths of his characters short speeches that are models of eloquence. And, if we wish to find an example of the perfect short sermon, we have only to

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turn to the New Testament. These speeches, it is true, do not develop elaborate arguments or take a wide survey of desperate controversies. But they at least suggest a doubt whether genius, if it exists, will ever fail to come to terms with brevity. It is quite conceivable that there might have been far more great speeches in literature if human beings in the past had not insisted on speaking so long.

The quarrel between length and brevity in literature is an old one. It was a Greek poet who said that 'a great book is a great evil', and probably more books have died of length than of any other disease. In our own time we have had several controversies about the length of novels, some critics maintaining that a novel should be long, others that it should be short. It is a rather pointless controversy, since a novel good enough to live for ever may clearly be as long or as short as *War and Peace* or *David Copperfield* or *Pride and Prejudice* or *Treasure Island*. The Titans of genius, we know, who can invent nations of characters and endow them with life in our imaginations, naturally turn to the longer novel. *David Copperfield* could no more have been written in the same space as *Treasure Island* than the *Iliad* could have been written in the same space as the ballad of Sir Patrick Spens. But there are few Titans, and the writer who is not a Titan injures his chance of surviving by

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writing at a length beyond his genius. Fewer epics have survived than ballads ; fewer plays than lyrics. That genius can express itself in the briefest form is clear from what Milton and Wordsworth achieved with the sonnet. In prose, again, we find that all Addison's essays and some of Lamb's greatest were short pieces of less than two thousand words. The short story, obviously, may be of twenty different lengths, ranging from the brevity of Daudet to the shorter novel length of Conrad ; and all of these are good. I hope and believe that much the same is true of speeches, and that, just as great lyrics are still written in a world that no longer produces epics, so great speeches will be made in greater and greater numbers as long speeches are relegated to the literature of the past. Let the orators cease to despise quarters of an hour and, if they have genius, they will discover that they can perform miracles with them. With orators, as with writers, indeed, long-windedness is usually merely the attempt of weakness to imitate strength, of emptiness to imitate fullness. The red bulb may yet be a signal for the birth of a new and delightful literary form.

VII. The Orators

NOT for twenty years had I found myself listening to the orators at the Marble Arch on a Sunday evening. The appetites alter as we grow older, and I had long since lost my love of mixing in crowds harangued on all sorts of themes by all sorts of speakers. As a boy I looked on a street-corner meeting as one of the pleasures not to be missed. I do not think I ever expected to hear any great wisdom from the speakers, but their passion or assumption of it attracted me ; some of them were humorists, others were unintentionally amusing ; and, with luck, there were interruptions. There is something that compels our attention in the spectacle of a human being who, believing that he holds the key of salvation, offers it with frenzied earnestness to the idlers and loungers of the street corners. There is something interesting, too, in the persistence of the born speaker as he continues to fill the air with his voice year after year in a world that remains fundamentally unmoved by him. Is it egotism or the love of his fellow-creatures that persuades a man to climb on to a box and offer wisdom to the multitude without money and without price ? There must, I imagine, be a vein of sincerity in any man who devotes his spare

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time to the instruction of others who show no wish for instruction, but it is also probable that no one ever went on speaking for long who did not ultimately find pleasure in listening to his own voice. The street orator draws us into his circle not only as a fanatically serious man, but as a man who is playing his favourite game with all his energies. He is the centre of a show as well as a flickering light of faith.

Yet, as one grows older, one ceases to take the same interest in the show. If one continues to be a loungeur, one lounges by the fire and no longer in the chill darkness of winter streets. Perhaps, too, one loses most of one's curiosity about the varieties of belief among street-corner orators. I should certainly not have gone into Hyde Park on Sunday evening if I had not had an hour to spend on my way to Paddington Station and nowhere else to spend it. Yet, when I arrived in the Park, with the crowds massed like shadows round a score of platforms, it was clear that, if I had lost my interest in open-air oratory, a considerable part of the world had the same interest in it as of old. Not that the oratory was even audible at the first platform. A tall Indian was standing on the platform and his mouth was opening and shutting and his right arm gesticulating as he advocated (apparently) Indian Home Rule, but his audience was engaged in a number of arguments on its own account, loyalists and

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revolutionaries forming themselves into clumps and arguing, shouting, jeering, laughing at each other. And even the audience was scarcely audible except as a tumult of inarticulate sounds, since one argument drowned another and few except the arguers knew what they were fighting about.

One of the fiercest of the arguments was carried on by a patriotic young woman and an excitable young man whom she had evidently accused of being an alien. She said she was proud of being British, at which he and his friends laughed uproariously. 'But tell me,' said he, with an air of honest inquisitiveness, 'what is there to be prahd of in being British? Who made you British? Were you responsible for it? You know perfectly well you had nothing to do with it, so wot is there to be prahd of?' She repeated, so far as could be heard, that she was proud of it. 'But 'ow could any intelligent person be so silly?' he asked, looking round at the bystanders and blowing out a lungful of smoke. 'I was born in England, but I'm not prahd of it. I 'ad nothing to do with it. It just 'appened. It's nothing to be *prahd* of.' 'God Save the King!' cried some one. 'Certainly, God Save the King,' agreed the dark young man; 'but she 'asn't answered my question wot is there to be prahd of in being British. I could understand 'er bein' prahd of 'aving baked a cake or made a 'at, because she'd

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'a' done it 'erself, but wot is there to be prahd of in just bein' born? A Frenchman can't 'elp bein' born in France, or an American in America. Wot's the good of everybody bein' prahd of 'avin' been born in his own country? I can't understand,' he said, addressing the girl again, 'ow you can believe anything so perfectly idiotic.' 'Now you're calling me names,' said the girl. 'I'm not,' said the man. 'You called me an idiot,' said the girl. 'I did nothing of the sort,' said the man; 'I know you're not an idiot, but why do you talk like one?' All this was accompanied and interrupted by the comments, applause and jeers of other bystanders, while a new Indian orator stretched his arm helplessly towards the disputants and shouted in a pleading voice: 'Please, please. You, you.' But the disputants were too busy screaming and shouting at each other to look at or listen to him, and the young man, who was something of a philosopher, had soon taken on another opponent who was arguing that the recent Labour successes at the municipal elections were due to the apathy of the electorate. 'Wot's the use of saying apathy?' he demanded. 'You might as well say——' He was really quite clever with the 'You-might-as-well-say' style of argument. And he also had a gift for generalizations. 'Every Government gets swept off its feet sooner or later,' he declared. 'Stanley Baldwin will get swept off

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'is feet before long, and,' he added with grim impressiveness, 'e knows it.'

If it is open to question whether vanity or the love of truth is the ruling passion of the open-air orator, it is equally open to question whether vanity or the love of truth is the ruling passion of the interrupter. Probably there are people who go to the Marble Arch every Sunday evening and who, if they went home without having interrupted some orator or argued with some bystander, would feel that the evening had been wasted. These are men and women who have not the staying power to make a long speech or the self-confidence to stand on an eminence above their fellow-men. They are the snipers of religion and politics. They, too, like the orators, are playing their favourite game. That perhaps explains why it is that, in spite of the insults they hurl and the passion with which they speak, they remain so marvellously good-humoured. You would imagine again and again that blows were about to be struck, when a chance remark sets both disputants and bystanders roaring with laughter. Even the orators, I presume, get to enjoy the interruptions as part of the game, and they probably realize that if there were no interruptions there would be smaller audiences. So high a value do I place on interruptions as aids to the enjoyment of public meetings that I should like to see the names of the great interrupters,

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whoever they were, sharing the starry immortality of the great orators, Demosthenes, Cicero and Burke.

At the same time, I doubt whether the little man with the long, gentle brown beard, and the round spectacles, whose stand bore the legend, 'The New and Late House of Israel', altogether relished the help of the noisiest of his interrupters. There was an extremely serious Scotsman heckling him about Hell, and he replied to his questions with saintly patience, or rather he tried to reply to them. But no sooner had he begun to explain: 'Yes, my friend, when a man dies his body goes to Hell—that is Sheol—that is the grave,' when a huge white-headed Irishman, with the voice of a drill-sergeant shouting, 'Stand at ease,' roared: 'Tell me this. The first writer and the first reader of the Bible, which came first?' The New and Late House of Israel looked at him for a moment with a sorrowful expression and then turned back to the Scotsman: 'And the spirit, my friend,' he resumed. 'Answer my question,' roared the Irishman: 'the first reader or the first writer of the Bible, which came first?' 'And the spirit,' continued the speaker, 'goes to Heaven.' 'One of them's bound to have come first,' declared the Irishman, sticking to his point. He then entered into a fiery war of words with an American bystander, while the speaker continued to explain the

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triple mystery of body, soul and spirit above the hubbub. The dispute ended in a shout of laughter, the Irishman saying he always liked a good laugh, and then raising his terrific voice and yelling at the New and Late House of Israel: 'Hi, why aren't *you* laughing?' 'I'm not laughing,' said the sad little man, 'because I feel so sorry for you.' 'But if,' continued the Socratic Scotsman in the crowd, 'the spirit is the seat of the reason, and the reason is the faculty that tells me to do right and to do wrong, then where is the difference between right and wrong?' 'The gentleman asks me,' said the orator, 'if the spirit is the seat of the reason, and the reason is the faculty which tells me to do right and also to do wrong——' 'Did you ever see a cross-roads,' bawled the Irishman, 'with four sign-posts pointing different ways?' The orator paid no heed to him. 'He's never seen a cross-roads,' shouted his persecutor; 'man, you're a lunatic at large.' It was in vain for the gentle little apostle to attempt to expound his views of right and wrong to the Scotsman, for he never got half a sentence out without the Irishman's stentorian voice breaking in on him with 'What a stunt!' or 'Hi, are you the Lost Ten Tribes?' or some perfectly irrelevant remark to the crowd such as 'I'll lay he's married'.

Not far away a lady in a striped jersey, whose mission I could not make out, was explaining

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to a small circle the symptoms of typhoid fever—explaining them with a frankness from which I modestly withdrew. Farther on, beyond a number of Catholic and Protestant apologists, a crowd had gathered round a thin, exhausted-looking little man who was sitting on a park chair taking his watch out of his pocket and putting it back again, and nervously fingering a hymn-book. Some members of the crowd had evidently come to bait him. As they called on him to begin, he waved his hymn-book impatiently at them as a sign for them to be silent. There was a small group who pretended to have a claim to his pitch. ‘ ‘Ere,’ he cried, suddenly jumping on to the chair, ‘ ‘ow can Christianity ‘ope to flourish in this country with one Christian comin’ to try to steal another Christian’s pitch? Everybody knows that this is my pitch, and nobody else is goin’ to ‘ave it. We will begin the meeting now by singing the ‘ymn “ ‘Ow sweet the nyme of Jesus sahnds in a believer’s ear ”.’ One of his baiters called out something. ‘ ‘Ere,’ cried he, waving his hymn-book, ‘I’m not going to allow none of that blasphemous talk at my meetings. I know ‘oo you are. They’re the ‘Yde Park Atheists,’ he told the rest of us; ‘I can smell ‘em.’ He glowered at them for a few seconds, and then turned to his hymn-book again. ‘We will now,’ he repeated, ‘sing the ‘ymn, “ ‘Ow sweet the nyme of Jesus sahnds in a believer’s ear.”’ If any Christians

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are present, they will join in the singing. If nobody joins, at the close of the 'ymn I'll declare the meeting at an end. Some of you people seem to think this is an easy job. It's not. If anybody thinks it is, let 'im come up and tyke my plyce, and I'll tyke 'is.' Some one threw a penny into the circle, and some one else another. He tightened his mouth up into his cheeks and looked more than words could utter. ' 'Ow sweet the nyme—— ' he began again, and, as another penny fell, called out angrily, ' 'Ere, stop throwing your dirty money 'ere. I won't 'ave it. I won't toleryte disorderly be'yviour at this meeting.' He then began singing the hymn, with scarcely a voice raised to help him, beating time with his right hand. As he sang, foolish young men scuffled round his chair, looking for the pennies with matches, and foolish girls laughed hysterically. Other pennies fell with a clink, but he stuck nobly to his task and paid no heed to them till he was finished.

I shall never know how the meeting finally ended or whether he kept his terrible threat to close it abruptly, for it was time to leave for Paddington. But, even if it had not been necessary to go, I should scarcely have stayed. These interruptions savoured a little too much of cruelty. There was no play of good humour in them, nor even a noble lunacy. Still, I do not suppose the evangelist needed pity. Prob-

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ably he was the happiest man in the crowd. No doubt, as he went home, he was able to comfort himself with the reflection that this was the sort of thing that happened to St. Peter and St. Paul long ago.

VIII. The Bear



DURING the week a bear has appeared in Sussex, and an eagle is reported to have been seen swooping down on a lamb in Buckinghamshire. The bear, in the amount of interest it has caused, has been the rival of statesmen, film-actresses, jockeys and University oarsmen. This is partly because a bear in Sussex in these days is a paradox, and also because you can no more ignore an escaped wild beast than an escaped lunatic. There are brave people who ask, 'Who could be frightened of a bear?'—a question which is melancholy evidence of the decay of Bible-reading in the present generation. No one who was brought up on the story of Elisha and the bears could fail to realize that the bear, though the bald man's friend, is an exceedingly dangerous animal. It is true that the three bears in Southey's fairy-tale have somewhat endeared the species to our imaginations, but that is not a true story. The real bear, while a harmless enough animal in its harmless moods, has other moods in which, if it meets you, it will rise on its hind legs and embrace you in a hug that will crack your ribs. It may not eat you, but it will leave you in a condition in which you do not care whether it eats you or not. Let us

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not then speak disparagingly of the event that has made life in Sussex so stimulating during the past week. I confess frankly that, if I were at present living in Sussex, and if, walking along a country lane under the new moon, I had seen a brown bear padding slowly towards me, I should have been so frightened, that, however frightened the bear might have been, he could not possibly have been so frightened as I was. I might know that I was harmless, and he might know that he was harmless, but how could either of us know that the other was harmless? In such circumstances, there is nothing for it but to trust to instinct and fly.

It is only when an animal such as a lion, a bear or a serpent escapes from a menagerie that most of us begin to remember the existence of dangerous animals. Lulled by civilization into a false sense of security, we forget that even these islands, from which the wolf, the lion and the rhinoceros have long since disappeared, are still thronged by so vast a number of dangerous animals that a nervous man, if he thought of them, would hesitate to go out for a walk unarmed. Particularly dangerous is the bull. Travellers come back from Asia and Africa with tales of adventures with lions, tigers and elephants, and we think of them as daring fellows for exposing themselves to the perils of such company. We forget that we have roaming about the fields at home animals as terror-striking

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as any of them. If you find yourself in the middle of a field with a bull, looking at you from a few yards away, lowering his head and bellowing as though you had once done him a wrong that at last there was a chance to avenge, you will realize at once that there is no need to go out of England, equipped with the kit of a big-game hunter, in order to live dangerously. I do not know how many bulls there are in England, but I do know that the bull is not yet extinct, and that England will not be a safe country while this remains so. Sometimes, as I have crossed a field containing one of these ferocious animals—or an animal that to a nervous eye looked as though he might be one—I have wondered what I should do if he took it into his head to attack me. ‘Never run away from a bull’ has been one of my principles since childhood—a principle that is rather less gallant than it sounds, since it is based on the knowledge that, if it came to running, the bull could run faster than I. But, if one does not run away from an angry bull, what on earth can one do? Since I began to carry a snuff-box as a means of breaking myself of the cigarette habit, I have often thought that the best thing to do would be to throw the contents of the snuff-box in the bull’s face. While he was sneezing, one would have time to run to the gate and climb over it. There is nothing that so incapacitates a human being

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as sneezing, and I have no doubt that it is the same with other animals. What could be more satisfying to the soul than the spectacle of a bull that had had it in his mind to gore you standing impotently sneezing in the middle of a field while you gazed back at him triumphantly from the right side of the gate ?

At the time at which I lived in the greatest peril from bulls, however, I had not yet learned the uses of snuff. In those days when crossing a field containing a bull—or, as I have said, an animal that to a nervous eye looked like a bull—the plan that used most often to flash through my mind was to take off my coat as the bull rushed at me and throw it over his horns, blinding him long enough to allow me to escape. In case the coat missed, I had a second plan of seizing the bull by the horns—do not proverbs advise this?—and jerking myself on to his back, leaving the rest to fate. Luckily, I have never had to put either plan into practice. Whenever I have found myself alone in a field with a bull, I have attempted to deceive the bull into the belief that I was not running away from him, but have sidled towards the hedge so slowly as to give as little appearance of movement almost as a pillar of salt. Then, having reached the hedge, I have accelerated, but how I scrambled through it or over it in so few fractions of a second was a mystery equally insoluble to the bull and to me. I am confident

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that the whole secret of dealing with bulls lies in throwing dust in their eyes in this fashion. The bull, like most other animals, is most likely to run after you if you run. Run by all means if you have enough of a start to be sure of reaching the gate first. But it is no use running if you are certain to be overtaken. The very act of running enables the bull to toss you with all the greater violence. It is not, I admit, easy to walk in such circumstances. Pretend as you will not to notice the beast, as you stroll with ill-acted unconcern towards the gate, the bull has an unpleasant way, as he paws the ground behind you and snuffles, of emitting warm clouds of bellowing that reach the calves of the legs and awaken a tingling of the nerves that creeps up the spine. This interferes with the free play of the muscles of locomotion, and there are times when, with the feeling of an imaginary pair of bull's horns in the small of your back, the bull himself being real, it is an effort to raise a foot from the ground. Even so, you must pull yourself together, and continue to advance slowly, though every muscle writhes under the restraint and the breath of the bull comes so close behind you that it seems to burn you through your trousers. The ecstacy, the elation, that you will feel when at last you are through or over the gate will recompense you for all you have gone through. I often wonder who it was invented gates and hedges. If you

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have ever been chased by a bull you will wish to canonize him.

I was once present in a company of men and women who were discussing the animals of which they stood in most fear—animals, I mean, such as are commonly found in England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales—and it was then that it was first brought home to me what a great number of terrifying animals exist in these islands. There was scarcely a single common animal of which some one was not afraid. Cats, dogs, mice, mosquitoes, bees, wasps, spiders, beetles, earwigs, adders, hens, ganders, swans, goats, horses, rams, bulls, bats, turkey-cocks, boars—everybody was afraid of one or other of them. In many cases, the terror seemed to be spiritual rather than physical. This I can scarcely understand. I cannot be afraid of an animal unless I suspect that it has some power to hurt my body. I am always the person who is called on to eject a spider from the bathroom. Before spiders and beetles I am as bold as Horatius Cocles. Nor do I quail at the sight of a mouse running across the floor. Once, I confess, I was frightened by a mouse, but the circumstances were exceptional. The mouse had got into my bed and under the bed-clothes as I lay sleeping, and I woke to find it running in circles round my chest in a desperate effort to escape. If you have ever been to a Spiritualistic séance and been tapped in the

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darkness by a spirit on the toe or in the hair, you will know something of the uncanny shudder that went over me as I sprang from the bed, shouting as in a nightmare, and turned on the light. But my terror was not a purely spiritual terror, as I am sure the terror many people feel of spiders and beetles is. Even the common dread of the earwig, I think, is mainly spiritual. The old tradition that the earwig creeps into the ear and bores its way into the brain probably lingers in our memories, and accounts for part of our dislike of it. But we should have disliked earwigs even if there had been no such tradition. Earwigs look as if nature meant us to dislike them. We continue to dislike them long after we have come to realize that they are infinitely less dangerous than hens. The fear of cats, where it exists, is also a spiritual fear. I have never met anybody who was afraid to be in the room with a cat, and who would have explained his fear as an apprehension that the cat would injure him. The fear of cats can be explained in my opinion only if we accept the doctrine of the transmigration of souls. If you find a human being afraid of cats, you may be sure that he or she was a bird or a mouse or a rat in a previous incarnation. As for the fear of the bat, while partly spiritual, it is also partly physical. One is more alarmed at the notion of being bitten by a bat than at the notion of being touched by a bat. Still, there are a number

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of harmless creatures from which the sense of touch shrinks. I have met people who could not bear to take a bird in their hands, so much did they dislike the feeling of feathers. The fear of the bee and the wasp, on the other hand, is an honest fear of real danger. You and I have no spiritual objection to wasps. If wasps had no stings, we should not mind how many wasps there were in the world. A moth, however, though we know it cannot sting us, can fill us with terror if it brushes our face with its wings. The boar, disgusting though it is of eye and of utterance, does not in this manner make us shudder almost to the screaming point. As we watch his frothing jaws, we know that we are in the presence of an animal capable of hurting, not only our finer feelings, but our limbs. And so with dogs, horses, swans, stags, goats, gnats, adders and hens (with chickens). Here we are faced with actual physical peril: we may be bitten, kicked, stung, pecked, tossed or gored. Having lived among such dangers all their lives, perhaps, the people of Sussex have been able to regard the addition of a mere bear to the local fauna as a trifle. Still, I think I would rather face even a swan or a goat than a bear—anything, perhaps, except a bull. I have been chased by a bull.

IX. The Beginner ~ ~ ~

WHEN I read the booklet describing the hotel to which I was going and came on the words, 'Golf course of nine holes in hotel grounds', I felt stirring within me a curious craving for a new experience. I had never played golf except twice as a boy, and that could hardly be called playing. If I had known of a secret course, hidden away from all human eyes, I should undoubtedly have begun to play years ago, but every course I had seen seemed as public as the stage; and, apart from that, one feels a certain shame in getting into other people's way, as a beginner is bound to do. It seemed unlikely, however, that there would be any great crowd staying at a remote hotel by the sea in October, and I determined at least to take a bagful of clubs with me and see what hand I could make at the game when, if ever, nobody was looking.

When I had arrived at the hotel it was as if a dream had come true. There were only a few visitors remaining after the rainy summer, and of those few scarcely anyone seemed to care for golf. The course dipped to the edge of the sea and rose to the tops of the hills, as lonely almost as Robinson Crusoe's island. Red-stained sheep lay sleepily on the greens.

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A rill serpentined through the long grass, haunted by ducks and wagtails and filling the valley with peaceful music. Everything was, from my point of view, perfect, except that the first tee was just outside the front door and that three of the greens were gazed upon by a hundred windows. It is curious what a powerful effect windows have on the imagination. Each of them seems a potential critic, and, if you suspect that even one person is idly looking out of one of them, it puts you off your stroke. So, at least, I thought, and I determined not to attempt my first stroke under such censorship. When I put the case before a friend who knew something of golf and consented to play with me, he agreed to go with me in search of a tee so distant from the hotel that my first stroke should be visible to no eye but that of Providence. Even so, as I went out of the hotel, with the golf clubs under my arm, I had a curious sense of being an impostor. I should have felt more honest if I had been carrying sandwich-boards bearing in large letters the announcement: 'I don't really play golf,' so that no one should be deceived into mistaking me for a golfer. On reaching our secret tee I scanned the hillside and the valley for possible spectators. A motor-car was approaching rapidly along the road that cuts through the course, but we could wait till that was past. I could see a man working in a distant

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vegetable-garden, but he was stooping and his back was turned to us. An old horse was cropping the grass a few yards away, but he was interested only in the grass. My friend placed a white ball on a little wooden tee, and I drew a wooden club from the bag. There can be few emotions more delicious than that of the man who takes a wooden club into his hands for the first time with intent to strike. One is electric with anticipations, hopes and skyey longings; the blood sings in the veins, and the very shaft of the club seems to be a part of one's nervous system and to tingle with expectation. Had I hit the ball, it would undoubtedly have been a perfect drive, and I confess I was surprised that I had not hit it; but my friend said: 'You lifted your head. You must never lift your head.' As I addressed myself to the ball again, he said: 'Always keep your nose at exactly the same distance from the ball,' and at those words the poetry of golf died for me. The club became a mere wooden thing; there was no longer singing in my veins; and joyous anticipation became degraded into grim determination. I was no longer a player but a man trying to keep his nose in the right place.

Strange is the patience of golfers with those who do not play golf. Perhaps it is because those who do not play golf are so unbounded in their admiration of golf. Every time my friend hit the ball I was as round-eyed in my wonder

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as a child seeing fireworks. At every tee he made the stroke that I had intended to make at the first tee when I took the club in my hands, and I suppose that, in a sense, in admiring him I was admiring my own ideal strokes. But he would seldom accept my praise. 'No,' he would say, 'I sliced that badly,' or 'No, I should have reached the green with that one'; and as a result of this my admiration for the strokes that he made was increased by the admiration for the strokes that he ought to have made. By the time we had completed the course I had learned that I ought to keep my left arm straight; that I oughtn't to use the right arm; that I ought to keep my eye on the place where the ball had been a second after I had hit it, if I did hit it; that I ought to imagine that the club was a leaden weight on the end of a string and that I was swinging it (or something like that)—I had learned, I say, that I ought to do all these things, but I had not learned to do them.

Still, you will realize how far I had advanced into the mysteries of golf by the end of three days when I tell you that my friend then said to me: 'I'll play you for half a crown and give your four strokes a hole.' It is apparently impossible for any human being to give another human being four strokes a hole, for I won the half-crown. That, perhaps, gave me a new interest in golf. I began to be an appreciative

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listener to conversations in which men said such things as : ' I always do Number 7 with a mashie.' ' With an ordinary mashie ? You couldn't do it with an ordinary mashie.' ' Well, as a matter of fact, it's a rather heavy mashie.' ' I shouldn't have thought it was possible to get there with a mashie. I always use an iron.' I often talked to the head waiter about golf during meals, asking him such questions as : ' What's bogey for Number 3 ? ' The head waiter was an excellent golfer with a dramatic sense, who, as he went from table to table talking about the game, illustrated his conversation with imaginary drives from the sixth tee, getting out of holes with a niblick, and putting on an ill-mown green. ' Should have been in at Number 6 in three this morning,' he would say ; ' just missed it by a blade of grass.'

All this talk became to me daily sweeter. Sometimes in the evening I could interest myself over a whisky and soda in the talk of motorists, with their ' By the way, I did Chapel Hill this morning. It's terrific.' ' What's the gradient ? ' ' They say it's one in four, but it seemed to me in places more like three and a half.' ' Did you come down Heytesbury ? ' ' Rather. I heard to-day there are a couple of men in Waterton Hospital who had a bad upset at the turn at the bottom.' ' I went as far as Slowcombe. Been there ? There's a beautiful

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piece of road just before you come to it. I was able to do fifty for three miles or so.' But, interesting as such conversation was, it never became positively entrancing as did that delicious flow of talk about the sixth hole, bogey, niblicks, mashies and baffies.

I suppose I had the tell-tale light in my eyes, for, after my friend had left the hotel, other guests would approach me with 'What about a game in the morning?' and, though I always protested that I did not play, I always played. People who had never won a game of golf in their lives sought me out and offered to play with me, and, as they came home after beating me, their faces had a look of extraordinary happiness. I found myself playing in four-somes partnered by ladies of such noble courtesy that they would consult me as to which club they should use at various strokes. I made it almost a rule to say: 'I should use a baffy. Yes, I think a baffy.' For a great love of the baffy had grown up within me. I began to cultivate views of my own, and when an opponent, anxious to instruct me, would call out: 'Niblick. You should use a niblick,' I would reply gravely and obstinately: 'No, I think I'll stick to the old mashie.'

Even when no one else was there to play with, I began to creep out of the hotel towards my secret starting-place, never feeling less alone than when alone with my golf clubs. Nothing

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else seemed to matter but making another attempt at that great drive of which I had dreamed on the first day. No longer was I content, as I used to be, to sit gazing at the sea for hours. There were ravens croaking in the neighbourhood and a buzzard frequently soaring in the sky, but I who was once devoted to birds could spare them scarcely more than a cursory glance. I ceased to drink afternoon tea, normally the most necessary of meals, for there were better ways of spending the last remnants of the daylight. And I forgot the stars, the moon, the sun, and I forgot the blue above the trees, and I forgot the dells where waters run, and I forgot the chilly autumn breeze ; I had no knowledge that the day was done. Often I would play, myself a ghost, with the ghost of a ball on into the darkness.

Even spectators ceased to be able to terrorize me into indolence. There was a messenger boy who used to pause and, leaning his bicycle against the railings, watch me as I drove off from the top of the hill at the sixth tee ; and, though at first I longed to call out to him : ‘ Go away. Can’t you see I’m only a beginner ? ’ I became used to his inquisitive presence, and even found him useful as he shouted out directions as to where my ball was lying in the tousled grass. I hoped, however, that he knew nothing about golf, and that he even thought that what I was playing was golf

The Beginner

as it ought to be played. One day he watched me with fascinated eyes as I approached the green at the side of the road. A farm labourer extended on a cartload of ferns also stopped his horse to watch me. I again had the impulse to say: 'Please go away,' but, restraining myself, I achieved a delightful shot that landed the ball within a couple of feet of the hole. There must be something inspiring in being watched with breathless interest by a messenger boy and a labourer chewing grass. It was with a sense of triumph that I saw the ball rolling into the hole; and the labourer started his horse again and the boy his bicycle, looking all the happier for what they had seen.

And yet, to be quite honest, my golf went daily from bad to worse. And the worse it became the more I loved it. Some day, if I can find a player worse than myself, I shall perhaps play again. If only I could discover a beginner, that, I think, would be the height of happiness. How I should love telling him to keep his nose always at the same distance from the ball, to keep his left arm straight, and to imagine that the club was a ball of lead on the end of a string, and to give him a stroke a hole, even if at the end of the game I had to pay him half a crown.

X. Writing Letters ~ ~ ~

IT was recently announced that a popular Member of Parliament answered some two thousand letters a week. His record was said to be three hundred and seven letters in three hours. Those of us who find it difficult to answer even one letter a day cannot but envy such a genius for verbosity. Given a secretary and a typewriter, however, even the most dilatory may become verbose. There is a luxurious feeling in sitting in a chair and booming out words without any of that effort of hand that accompanies writing. It is probably easier to dictate fifty letters than to write one. At the same time, it is clear that many persons do not find the act of writing a burden. Some of the busiest men are also the busiest correspondents. The man who hates letter-writing will have no time to write a letter even if he has nothing else to do. The man who likes letter-writing will find time to write a letter even on a day on which he has to address two public meetings, attend six committees, and write part of a three-act play. Mr. Gladstone had this miraculous gift of correspondence. Mr. Shaw, I fancy, also has it. The difficulty for such men would be not to write. Total abstinence from ink would be the greatest punishment

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with which you could threaten them. Their superabundant energy can express itself only through a fountain-pen. Those of us who are reluctant to write letters, on the other hand, are equally the slaves of our personality. We are shy of writing letters, perhaps, that are not worth sending. Even when some one writes to ask us a simple question we do not like to send a curt answer like a Cabinet Minister saying, 'The reply is in the affirmative.' We feel there would be something unfriendly in such brevity, and so we put off answering while we meditate a longer letter. The first time the ordinary human being becomes conscious of the discourtesy of brevity is when in his boyhood he writes home to his parents for money. He knows he wants five shillings, but he is ashamed to say so bluntly, and yet there is nothing else to say. He begins: 'Dear Mother,—I hope you are quite well'. He would gladly run on at once: 'Please send me five shillings'. But he is sensitive enough to feel that the request for money should be kept in the background—should be thrust into a postscript if possible. Even a letter which ran: 'Dear Mother,—I hope you are quite well.—Your loving son, Alfred. P.S.—Please send me five shillings' would seem to him too abrupt in its greediness. Hence the child racks his brains to recall any incident of the day that may be worth mentioning to his elders. He is, as a rule, inarticulate

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as regards his affections, and he is not old enough to take pleasure in describing things seen or experienced. His letter, if he lengthens it, is a bald record of fact—people seen, drives, games. As length itself is an object, however, and he has a feeling that he ought to fill all the four sides of the note-paper, there is no fact too prosaic for him to set down. As he grows older, he becomes more critical as to the sort of facts that are worth setting down, and he adds the fear of dullness to the fear of brevity.

Now, there could be no greater preventives of letter-writing than the fear of being dull combined with the fear of being brief. The former forbids long letters; the latter forbids short ones. That is the reason why many people never answer letters at all. It is not that they do not compose the answers, but that they do not send them. They lie awake at night composing them. I know a man who spends sleepless nights composing a letter in reply to a second cousin in Australia who wrote to him nineteen years ago to congratulate him on his engagement. It is not the same letter that it used to be. It has altered with the years. It had to be rewritten when the man married. It had to be revised when the first child was born. The birth of the second child was another piece of news that had to be embodied in it. And now that the eldest child is seventeen, and a prize-winner at school, even the second child's

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birth seems a little out of date. And not only the narrative of the letter has changed from year to year, but the apologies with which the letter opens. At first it was : ' My dear Cousin, —I owe you a thousand apologies, but as a matter of fact I was so pressed for time, what with my work and with house-hunting . . . ' Then it changed to : ' I'm sure you will understand, but what with all the anxiety I have gone through owing to my wife's illness . . . ' Later on, he justified himself by relating how he had been moving into a larger house and one of the children had had whooping-cough. Wearying of the illness of the rest of the family, he began to deceive himself into inventing a long record of bad health for himself. He also referred vaguely to ' financial troubles ', though he found it difficult to remember exactly what they were. Then there was overwork, then there was the War, then there was influenza. His latest letter is full of influenza. It is difficult to spread influenza thin enough to make it cover nineteen years ; but people who do not write letters are extraordinarily brazen when it comes to making excuses. They will go almost any length in order to avoid making the frank confession that they suffer from the disease of epistolophobia. There are few commoner diseases, and yet there is no pity for the sufferers. They are universally accused of rudeness, ingratitude and pride. Their silence is regarded

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as insulting when it is really flattering. It is the silence of men who are not content to scribble off any old rubbish with a feeling that this will do well enough for their correspondents. They respect their correspondents too highly. And so they wait till they have something to say and time to say it. The farther off the correspondent is, moreover, the more particular they are as to what they say. A letter that will do for Sevenoaks does not seem quite worth sending to India. As for Australia, one sits down to write a letter to Australia in the mood of a man preparing to write a history of the civilized world. I do not know if everybody has this materialistic sense of space. I confess I have it strongly. I sincerely sympathize with the man whose second cousin in Australia congratulated him on his engagement. A letter from Australia throws a responsibility on a man from which the boldest may well shrink.

And yet, if there are good excuses for not writing to Australia, there are still better excuses for not writing to anyone at a shorter distance. After all, the infrequency with which one sees one's Australian friends rather calls for an exchange of letters. When one has a letter from anywhere nearer home, however, one has always a notion that one may be seeing the writer before long and that there is no need to waste time in correspondence. There is a good deal to be said for answering urgent letters by

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telegram. The letter that cannot be answered by telegram does not need to be answered at all. It is, I suppose, a good thing for the revenue that so many superfluous letters are written, but there is no denying that three-quarters of the letters written are unnecessary. That is why I object to the indignation of the people who like writing letters against the rudeness of the people who hate writing letters. There is a popular idea that letter-writing should be a matter of give-and-take. This is most unfair to the people to whom letter-writing is a form of torture. A. likes writing letters, and so he self-indulgently writes to B.; B. loathes writing letters, and he suffers anguish because he feels he is being rude in not answering A. at once. A. has all the pleasure of the correspondence, B. has all the pains. They might both be perfectly happy if it were generally recognized that their natures are different, and that A. should write all the letters, seeing that he enjoys writing. I have met many good conversationalists who are more than willing to carry on a one-sided conversation. Why is it that no one is willing to carry on a one-sided correspondence? Why should a letter be paid for by a letter? We are surely not merchants and hucksters in our friendships.

Anyhow, it is a safe rule that the only letters worth receiving are those from people who enjoy writing them. Letter-writing calls for

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that spontaneous overflow of the emotions that Wordsworth demanded in poetry. Walpole, Boswell, Cowper and Lamb were all natural chatterboxes with the pen. Boswell simply had to tell somebody, so he told his friend Temple. His letters are not tasks of friendship. They are things bursting to be written. They are the bubbling confessions of an egoist, as when he complains that his old Scottish father cannot appreciate him :

I write to him with warmth, with an honest pride, wishing that he should think of me as I am ; but my letters shock him, and every expression in them is interpreted unfavourably. . . . Temple, would you not like such a son ? Would you not feel a glow of parental joy ? I know you would ; and yet my worthy father writes to me in the manner you see, with that Scots strength of sarcasm which is peculiar to a North Briton. But he is offended with the fire which you and I cherish as the essence of our souls ; and how can I make him happy ? Am I bound to do so at the expense, not of this or the other agreeable wish, but at the expense of myself ? The time was when such a letter from my father as the one I enclose would have depressed ; but I am now firm, and, as my revered friend, Mr. Samuel Johnson, used to say, I feel the privileges of an independent human being.

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Lamb's letters, again, are obviously the work of a man who enjoyed writing them. Even when he writes to apologize to Dr. and Mrs. Asbury for having got drunk at a party in their house, he describes how he had to be carried home with more relish than shame. We feel that he would have suffered tortures if he had been unable to tell somebody all about his pickaback journey home :

But then you will say : What a shocking sight to see a middle-aged gentleman-and-a-half riding upon a Gentleman's back up Parson's Lane at midnight ! Exactly the time for that sort of conveyance, when nobody can see him, nobody but Heaven and his own conscience ; now Heaven makes fools, and don't expect much from her own creation ; and as for conscience, She and I have long since come to a compromise. I have given up false modesty, and she allows me to abate a little of the true. I like to be liked, but I don't care about being respected. I don't respect myself. But, as I was saying, I thought he would have let me down just as we got to Lieutenant Barker's Coal-shed (or emporium), but by a cunning jerk I eased myself, and righted my posture. I protest, I thought myself in a palanquin, and never felt myself so grandly carried. It was a slave under me. There was I, all but my reason.

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And what is reason ? and what is the loss of it ? and how often in a day do we do without it, just as well ? Reason is only counting, two and two makes four. And if on my passage home I thought it made five, what matter ? Two and two will just make four, as it always did, before I took the finishing glass that did my business. My sister has begged me to write an apology to Mrs. A. and you for disgracing your party ; now it does seem to me, that I rather honoured your party, for every one that was not drunk (and one or two of the ladies, I am sure, were not) must have been set off greatly in the contrast to me. I was the scapegoat. The soberer they seemed. By the way, is magnesia good on these occasions ? *iii pol : med : sum : ante noct : in rub : can :.* I am no licentiate, but know enough of simples to beg you to send me a draught after this model.

Who would not write letters if he could write after this fashion ? Lamb clearly enjoyed his letter as much as he had enjoyed his liquor. With him, letter-writing was a form of self-indulgence. That is what letter-writing, should always be. If we regard letter-writing in this light, those of us who seldom answer letters have quite as good a right as teetotallers have to plume ourselves on our superior morality.

XI. Interlude ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪

ONE bump into a bank, one drop into a ditch, one small collision with a very small car—on the whole, it is a satisfactory record for one's first Easter at the wheel. It is all the more satisfactory because none of the accidents were my fault. The bump into the bank was a woman's fault; the collision was a woman's fault; and the drop into the ditch was the ditch's fault for being there—for, when I began to reverse, I did not know that it was there. It may seem petty not to take the blame on myself for some of these things, and I should not mind taking the blame if I could do so without lying. But I could not. The way in which I came to bump into the bank was really this. It was the first day on which I had driven without having anybody else in the car who knew anything about driving. The Portsmouth Road was as full of cars as a sunbeam in a room is of specks of dust, and every driver, having had 'Safety first!' dinned into his ears for several weeks previously, was flying faster than his neighbour as if in a common effort to escape from some pursuing danger. I, too, though I began at a law-abiding crawl, after a time was caught by the infection, and found myself shooting forward like a bullet in a higgledy-piggledy medley of

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Rolls-Royces, Bentleys, Alvises and Austin Sevens, none of us daring to look round for fear of suffering an even worse fate than Lot's wife. I was on the look-out for a side-road that led to a friend's cottage, but at the rate at which the traffic was moving it was impossible to read the signposts. As each signpost rushed towards us, the woman at my side cried : ' This is it. No, it isn't. Yes, it is. No, no,' and we sped past it faster—much faster—than Hippolytus in his chariot. Then at last there came a signpost at which she said : ' I don't think this is it. Yes, yes. No, no,' and, as we came to the mouth of the road : ' Yes, it is.' Now, to travel down one leg of a V and to turn with a rush, at a moment's notice, the sharp corner into the other leg is a trick that my instructor had never taught me : in fact, he had earnestly warned me against it. Fast as I turned the steering-wheel, the bank at the far side of the bend approached me faster, and, though I had both feet pressed down hard on brake and clutch-pedal, the car made a determined attempt to leap the bank, like a horse in the Grand National, and decided against it only when it was, as it were, standing on its hind legs. The lorry that was rushing down the other leg of the V luckily pulled up in time, and, as I backed into safety, all the world seemed to be enjoying some joke except me. When an accident of this kind used to happen, my instructor always said : ' I'm

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glad that happened. A thing like that teaches you more than twenty lessons.' So, as we resumed our journey, I said gravely : ' I'm glad that happened. A thing like that teaches one more than twenty lessons. What I ought to have done, of course, was to drive on past the road and then come back again. Still, it was all your fault for hesitating.' ' Still,' she reminded me, ' you're glad it happened.' ' I wouldn't have missed it for worlds,' I lied. ' At the same time,' she said, ' when you're turning a sharp corner, I should always, if I were you, try to slow down to at least thirty miles an hour. You never know when some perfectly reckless person—perhaps a woman driver or a learner—may be coming round the corner in the other direction.' ' Women drivers and learners,' I agreed, ' are a public danger. There ought to be some restriction on giving licenses to incompetent persons.' ' There ought,' she said.

There was, so far as I can discover, no one to blame when on the same afternoon smoke began to issue from the gear-box as we were climbing a steep hill, with a smell of burning that convinced my companion at first that I had set my clothes on fire with a cigarette. When smoke-clouds began to rise from under our feet, however, we realized that not I, but the car, was at fault, if fault was to be found at all. We leaped out of the car with fear in our hearts,

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and looked at it hard since there was nothing else that we could do. My companion hailed a passing motorist. 'What do you do,' she called to him, 'when you see clouds of smoke coming out of the floor of your car?' He had not the faintest notion what he did when clouds of smoke came out of the floor of his car; but he promised to send along an A.A. man if he met one. When he was gone, we looked hard at the car again, and then I began to open things as I had often seen motorists doing. 'Be careful,' cried my companion; 'you know you don't know anything about these things. If the car's on fire, it may explode.' So far as I could gather, the policy she favoured was that we should run into an adjacent field and wait at a distance for the explosion. I had, however, conceived an affection for the car since it had behaved so well at the bank, and I got out spanners and began to use them, a little vaguely, perhaps, but with an air of doing something. 'The carburettor's all right,' I said, with a notion of inspiring confidence. 'Oh, so you do know something about it?' my companion exclaimed joyfully. 'Yes,' I said, 'I don't think we need flood it. And it's not the magneto. Just possibly it might be the camshaft.' 'Perhaps,' she said, 'if you crawled under the car, you might be able to see what's wrong.' 'Perhaps,' I agreed, 'but Johnson never taught me how to crawl under a car.

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Besides, there is no room under this one.' 'Oh, everybody does it,' she said. 'Anyhow,' I continued, 'the car's no longer smoking. Let's get in again if I haven't put the machinery out of order and we'll drive slowly on to a garage.' The man at the first garage was a powerful red middle-aged man smeared with oil, who said that he had been in the Air Force and had had to leave it owing to nerve trouble after a crash. 'We didn't fly very high in those days,' he said, 'but high enough to fall from anyway,' and he invited us to examine his injured eye. He then flung himself on the car, tore at its entrails, struck it with a spanner, wrestled his way into it like a contortionist, and a voice, like Jonah's from inside the whale, reached us: 'It's either the clutch, or the gear-box wants oiling.' Oil, he discovered, was certainly lacking, and, having poured a quart into some obscure part of the machine, he said: 'Now, we'll try the clutch. There's a good hill not far off, and we'll give her a race up it.' He took the wheel and we set off in search of the hill, and 'race' is a moderate description of the speed at which he rushed us towards it. I had thought that I myself had enjoyed a few spurts of fast driving, but this brawny, jovial giant seemed to be able to send a car along at a pace at which you had to hold on your hat while the world flew past you invisibly. The hill was a long, steep hill full of bends, and he tore round

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every bend hooting, with the light of battle in his eyes. Then, having climbed the hill, he hurried off across country, down lonely lanes and up other hills, mile after mile, till I began to fear that his nerve trouble had returned and that he imagined he was carrying us off in an aeroplane. Suddenly, however, the last corner of a hundred corners was turned, and there was his garage—and safety—in view again. ‘She runs beautifully,’ he said, as he got out, and I loved him for the compliment.

The collision with the lady occurred on Easter Sunday. Already in the morning I had almost run into a policeman at a cross-roads in the middle of a small town, and, when I had apologized, he had replied—in a very sportsmanlike fashion, I thought—‘It’s all right. I’m insured.’ A little later, I happened to be going down a steep hill with a big car in front of me, both of us gathering pace in order to climb another steep hill. Farther ahead was a small car, and the big car swept past it like a draught of wind. Suddenly, however, the lady in charge of the small car lost her engine or something in changing gear and, instead of my sweeping past her, her car trickled slowly backwards down the hill, and, press the brake as hard as I could, I could not avoid the thump of my first collision. I got out, and the lady got out, and to my astonishment came over to me, and said in an agitated voice: ‘I’m awfully

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sorry.' It being my first collision, I naturally thought that the fault must be mine, and, almost before she had finished the sentence, I, too, had said: 'I'm awfully sorry.' The brake failed to act,' she said, 'I'm awfully sorry,' and again I said: 'I'm awfully sorry. I hope your car isn't damaged.' There was a great dent in the mudguard that had run into me, or into which I had run—so great, indeed, that it looked as if it had often run into things before. Meanwhile, there was a block of traffic coming from both directions, and men were leaping out of their cars to help or, if not to help, to give advice. And the lady repeated: 'I'm awfully sorry,' and I kept responding 'I'm awfully sorry,' till at last it struck us both simultaneously that there was a veritable Derby Day of motor-cars collecting before and behind us, and, with a last exchange of apologies, we climbed into our cars and crept off up the hill out of notice.

As for the drop into the ditch, that happened because my companion happened to want to call at a shop in a small town, and said: 'You can drive a few yards on and then turn,' as she left me. I set forward, looking for a place at which a novice could turn without disgracing himself—no easy task, for it was Easter Monday in one of the beauty-spots of England, with cars parked in every opening on both sides of the road and incessant streams of traffic flowing

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in both directions. I decided to go ahead in search of a gateway or a side road. Every gateway was occupied by a car, and there were no side roads. I drove a mile, and another mile, and another mile. Still no opening. Then at the end of the sixth mile I came to the turn at which I had run into the bank and I said to myself : ' I will back down this road and then turn.' I backed with almost excessive caution, watching the peccant bank all the time. Unfortunately, I had not observed that between the bank and the road there was a narrow but deep ditch, and somehow or other the wheels on the left side of the car contrived to guide themselves into the ditch, so that I suddenly found myself sitting in a car tilted over sideways like a drunkard's hat. I got out of the car and looked at it. A boy got off a bicycle and looked at it. Lorry-loads of holiday-makers passed rejoicing. I remembered that there was a garage not far off, and hurried to it for help. The mechanic came and looked at the car, and said : ' The only thing to do is to stop another car and get it to tow you out.' I felt a curious sense of humiliation at the prospect of being towed out of a ditch on Easter Monday, and I begged him to think of some other way. He surveyed the ditch for some moments, and observed that it became shallower a few yards farther back, and that, if we could twist the wheels straight, we might be able to extricate

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the car by backing. In an agony of mingled apprehension and hope I got into the car and began slowly to back, while he shouted : ' Yes, No. Stop. Go on. Yes. Stop. No. Go on. Yes. No. Go on. Stop. Once more. That's all right. Now we have it.' And, greatly to the disappointment of the boy with the bicycle, I was safely on level land again. ' I'm glad that happened,' I murmured to myself as I sped off up the hill in search of my companion ; ' that will teach me more than twenty lessons. . . . '

Still, it's rather amazing to have come through the week-end without anything you could really call an accident, considering that it was Easter and that all sorts of women drivers and learners and people who ought never to have been given a licence were on the roads.

XII. Noises



YET once more we are in the thick of a campaign against noises. Dr. Horton has been attacking the motorists who disturb his Sunday services by making the various noises within the gamut of motor-cars and motor-bicycles as they hurry past, and Sir Walter de Frece has been calling for the cessation of the inferno, due to similar causes on the Brighton front. The sense of hearing must surely be the most intolerant of all the senses, for among the letters of complaint that are a perpetually interesting feature of the newspapers, there must be at least three protesting against outrages on the ear for one that protests against outrages on the eye. Men are apparently more infuriated by what they hear than by what they see. Only a very sensitive man is kept awake at night by the unsightliness of modern life, but thousands lie awake cursing the noisiness of modern life. And there seems to be no cure for this noisiness. Banish one noise, and you only make room for another. Almost the only thing that the inventors cannot invent is silence. They have, if we may trust the writers of detective stories, invented silencers for revolvers; they have invented silencers for motor-cars. But they have never been able to invent a silencer

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for streets. They give us wooden pavements and asphalt to muffle the noise of wheels, and, even before the days of motor-cars, they gave us pneumatic tyres that made hansom-cabs so silent that, for the safety of the public, the horses had to make a new kind of noise with bells on their harness. But, with all their inventions for the comfort of civilized men and women, they have left us a world that is fuller of unpleasant noises than it has ever been in history.

And the rest of us are as helpless as the inventors. We have put down noise after noise only to find that the noise that remains is greater than ever. You would have imagined that London would become a great deal quieter as a result of the order forbidding whistling for taxi-cabs, but we look back on London of the whistles as a quieter place than the London of to-day. Similarly you would have thought that the prohibition of barrel-organs in many districts would have lessened the general din, but what are a few barrel-organs amid the uproar of London? We are told that in the old days the dustmen carried huge bells which they rang almost incessantly, and that, before pillar-boxes were set up, postmen stood at the street-corners and rang bells so loudly that people might bring out their letters to them. We have suppressed these nuisances, but we have suppressed them in vain. Certain suburban

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districts may be quieter than they used to be, though even that is doubtful; but I am sure the busier parts of the towns are noisier. And it is not merely that the noises have grown louder: they have also grown more nerve-wracking and hideous.

Certainly, I look back without detestation to the noises of thirty or forty years ago. The noises made both by nature and by the inventions of man were all but equally agreeable to the imagination. As for the noises of nature, there have been people who disliked the noise of the sea, and who could not even sleep in its neighbourhood; but to me there was nothing more lulling and delightful than the continuous bursting of waves on a long shore. I am not sure whether we should like the noise of waves so much if it were made, not by waves, but by a machine. So much of our pleasure is due to association that it is quite possible that, if the sea made a noise like a motor-horn, and if motor-horns made a noise like a breaking wave, we should praise the sea for making a noise that we should think intolerable in the motor-horn. It may have been because of the pleasures of association that, whenever I spent a month in a house overlooking a harbour, I was ravished not only by every sound made by the sea itself but by every sound made in the harbour. I loved the rattle of pulleys as the ships were being unloaded, the puffing of engines and the

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rumble of railway trucks on the line that connected the harbour with the station, the flapping of sails and the squeaking of cordage in the wind, the screaming of gulls, the lapping of water among the rocks and under the boats, the yelling of railwaymen. I liked all the noises of the place both collectively and individually, and no sight or sound or smell could, except by a miracle, have given me anything but pleasure in such surroundings. The very squeaking and clanging of the little iron gate through which people passed in order to cross the railway-line charmed the ear. There must have been a continuous succession of noises in the place, but they were noises that produced an impression of all-pervading peace.

It is the same, I imagine, with most country noises. They melt and merge into the general peace of nature. Our imaginations tolerate them because we associate them with the peace of fields under the sun and the stars. We hear them not merely with our ears but with our minds. The hooting of the owls does not disturb us, because they too are inhabitants of the universal peace of the countryside. Yet, if exactly the same noise that the owls make were made by motor-horns, we should vibrate with hostility as it punctuated the night hours, and should write to the papers protesting that the din made it impossible to sleep. Remove the noises made by birds from the country to

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the town, and you will be surprised to find how, as soon as they have lost their associations with rural peace, they begin to be resented as disturbers of urban peace. About twenty years ago a coachman living near Portland Place was summoned for keeping a thrush that was a serious nuisance to his neighbours because of its continual singing. A Harley Street surgeon, giving evidence in court, declared that the thrush's singing interfered with his work and that he had had to change his consulting-room because of it. It had, he declared, 'a singularly rasping, raucous tone. He had never heard a thrush like it before'. The proprietress of a nursing home also gave evidence that the thrush made 'a shrill, screeching noise'. I doubt, however, if the most melodious thrush in the world, singing from a cage in a London street, would have seemed melodious to these witnesses. Several witnesses on the other side, indeed, warmly defended the thrush's musical character. A bootmaker declared that it 'sang in a joyful and exhilarating way'. A veterinary surgeon testified that 'it sang beautifully and was a source of great pleasure to himself and family'. And the coachman's mistress spoke of it as a bird to which she could listen all day. Obviously, these conflicting witnesses heard the bird not with different kinds of ears but with different imaginations. The one group heard

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in the thrush's song only one more addition to the noises of the town. To the other group the town became the country as they listened to the bird, as Cheapside was transformed by a thrush's song in Wordsworth's poem. I myself, I think, should have been with those who regarded the thrush as a nuisance. Apart altogether from the objection to the caging of wild birds, one cannot help realizing that one can have too much even of the song of a thrush, and that a cage, by keeping it perpetually in the same place, prevents that coming and going which in nature brings constant variety in the day. In a country garden, every day in June is a day of surprises, with some change in the song or in the order and multitude of the songs. Our enjoyment of the song of the bird is the greater because it is beyond our control, and may cease just as we are longing for it to go on for ever. The song of a caged bird, however, goes on so long that we become critical and exasperated. I am sure the canary would give infinitely more pleasure with its song if it were a fleeting and uncontrolled visitor to the bushes in the garden, and nearly always flew away before we had time to get tired of it. A caged canary seems to many people only a monotonous machine of song. We do not associate it with the freedom and peace of the country, and so its song does not move our imaginations as the song of the nightingale or

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the willow-wren does. It seems, in most of our moods, simply a noise, as the song of the willow-wren itself would do if the willow-wren were a prisoner in the garden.

I fancy the townsman's objection to the crowing of cocks is also due to the fact that he hears it in his imagination, not as a country noise, but as a town noise. There are people living in the country who are disturbed by crowing cocks in the small hours, but they are for the most part townsmen who have migrated to the country. I am sure that there is nothing essentially unpleasant to the ear of man in the crowing of cocks. The very name, chanticleer, suggests that human beings loved the sound of cock-crowing till cocks were imported into towns. I do not think the bird has many enemies among the poets, and yet to the ear of the townsman the crowing of a cock in the small hours is scarcely less maddening than the sound of an electric drill. Some years ago a London magistrate declared from the bench that 'nothing more deadly or destructive to health and nerves can well be conceived than this perpetual cock-crowing'. If this were true, with what nervous wrecks of men and women would the countryside of England be strewn! But, of course, it is not true. It is only the townsman's intolerance of the addition of yet more noises of town that makes him speak ill of the noble music of chanticleer.

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It is his urban nerves, not the notes of the bird, that are at fault.

I doubt, indeed, whether man in a state of nature has any particular dislike of noise. The natural man, when he is young, loves to make a noise, whether by kicking a tin can or drawing a stick along railings. Some of his primitive instruments of music, such as drums, show how much he loves noise for the sake of noise. Italians and Frenchmen, living nearer the sunshine than ourselves, take pleasure even in the noises made by machinery, and rejoice in producing the maximum instead of the minimum of noise with their motor-cars. There is a kind of Wagnerian music in the traffic of Rome and of Nice. In Florence, the deliberate cracking of whips by the mule-drivers is like the noise of a battle. Perhaps, if we of the northern nations could persuade ourselves that the hatred of noise is not natural, and that there is no noise so ear-splitting that it cannot be enjoyed by those who can enjoy noise, we should end, not only by becoming reconciled to electric drills, motor-horns, grinding brakes, barrel-organs, barking dogs, gramophones at open windows, and shouting newsboys, but by getting positively to like them. We cannot get rid of noise in any case, so that we may as well learn to enjoy it. There are, by all accounts, worse things than noises in Hell, though, to hear a neurotic townsman talking, you would not think so.

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In order to think well of noise, indeed, one has only to imagine what a modern city would be if all noise were totally abolished—if soundless motor-cars sped through silent streets, if our feet made no sound on the pavements as we walked, if builders put up houses amid a silence as of the dead, if nothing that moved made a sound, and men, horses and birds went about their business as silent as moths. No continuous chorus of motor-horns or crowing cocks could be so ‘destructive to health and nerves’ as so still and universal a silence. After a week of it we should weep tears of joy if all the dogs suddenly began to bark again and all the sirens in the docks and factories to make a hideous hooting.

XIII. Fair Play for Man

THERE is a deep-rooted prejudice among human beings against human beings. Man is the butt of nine-tenths of their satire, and you would conclude, if you believed half what they have written about him, that he must be the most unpleasant and the most blackguardly of the animals. In recent years, it has been the custom to accuse him of a love of cruelty of which all the other animals are innocent. He is a beast of prey, we are told, not because he has to be a beast of prey or starve, but because he enjoys being a beast of prey. The tiger, it appears, is a humanitarian compared to him, and the boa constrictor is a kindly creature when it is not alarmed or hungry. I confess I do not share this sentimental view of wild animals, and I hold that the human being compares favourably with any of them from the elephant to the rat. Charming as the lions behaved to Daniel, I am sure that Daniel was a nobler creature than they, and Androcles was at least as kind to a later lion as the lion was to Androcles. I do not wish to speak ill of wild beasts, but merely to keep them in their place and to express my opinion that none of them has a better heart, say, than Mr. Baldwin. Man is undoubtedly cruel, but he is at least

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the only animal that tries not to be so cruel as nature made him.

Mr. Shaw, writing as ' Consul Junior ', in the *Daily News*, is the latest eminent human being to champion the other species of animals against his own race. A man of science, discussing Dr. Voronoff's plan for enabling us to live till we are a hundred and fifty by transplanting the glands of apes into our bodies, recently suggested that, as a result of such an operation, human beings would ultimately acquire the characteristics of apes such as cruelty and sensuality. Mr. Shaw, writing over the signature of an ape, cries out indignantly against the implication that apes are crueller and more sensual than human beings. ' We apes,' he declares, ' are a patient and kindly race ; but this is more than we can stand. Has any ape ever torn the glands from a living man to graft them upon another ape for the sake of a brief and unnatural extension of that ape's life ? Was Torquemada an ape ? Were the Inquisition and the Star Chamber monkey-houses ? Were ' Luke's iron crown and Damien's bed of steel ' the work of apes ? Has it been necessary to found a Society for the Protection of Ape Children, as it has been for the protection of human children ? Was the late war a war of apes or of men ? ' The answer to all these questions is, as the statesmen say, in the negative ; but even so they prove no more than if Mr. Shaw had asked :

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‘ Was Torquemada a Hottentot ? ’ The fact that Torquemada was not a Hottentot does not prove that the Hottentots are a kindlier race than Europeans. As for the suggestion that no ape has ever torn the glands from a living man in order to perform an experiment in rejuvenation on another ape, there is no reason to suppose that the self-denial of apes in this matter, so fortunate for ourselves, is prompted by motives of humanity. The ape is an animal less clever even than ourselves, and, if it spares us and our glands, this is due, not to any tenderness for us, but to its abysmal ignorance. Let the apes but go to school for a few centuries, and devote themselves to research work at their universities, and we shall find them experimenting on human beings as callously as human beings have ever experimented on animals. And why should they not ? Naturally, they think that the world was made for apes, and that it is better that a hundred human beings should perish than that one ape should suffer a headache. Man is a fairly insignificant creature in his own eyes, but his insignificance in his own eyes is nothing to his insignificance in the eyes of an ape. If ever the apes become civilized enough to conquer us, they will have no compunction, for all Mr. Shaw thinks to the contrary, in turning us into beasts of burden, vivisectioning us, and cooking us for their tables. There will be humane

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apes among them, who will protest against this, and who will plead that the human being has his rights as well as the ape ; but the mass of apes will never believe this, and many of them will even deny that a human being has feelings.

Certainly, no animal outside a legend has ever been known to spare a human being out of kindness. Human beings have societies for the preservation of wild animals in Africa ; the lions, on the other hand, have no society for the preservation of human beings. If a tiger is hungry it will kill a man as readily as look at him. The wolf does not spare even women and children. For centuries, indeed, human beings have gone about in fear of their lives because of the pitiless ferocity of wild animals. They have been chased by bulls, savaged by horses, scratched by cats, devoured by lions, stung by wasps, bitten by serpents, eaten by crocodiles, pursued by rhinoceroses, pestered by flies, frightened by spiders, attacked by swans, rushed at by elephants, butted by rams, pelted by monkeys, hugged by bears, robbed by foxes, flown at by hens, hunted by geese, swallowed by whales, made a meal of by sharks, poisoned by mosquitoes. But the full list of the animals that have perpetrated gross injuries on man would fill pages. I doubt, indeed, if there is a single animal that entered Noah's Ark that could be acquitted of a charge

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of cruelty. Even the birds, who of all animals are the kindest to us, are cruel to each other, or, when they are not cruel to each other, are cruel to the worms or the insects. The robin, if the books are to be believed, will murder his father. The young cuckoo will kick half a dozen hedge-sparrows to death in order to make room for himself in a nest to which he has no just claim. The hawk will swoop down on the song-thrush and peck out its brains. The starling will evict the nuthatch from its home with the brutality of a slum-landlord. The birds may be afraid of human beings, but their fear of human beings is small compared to their fear of other birds. If you asked a bird whether it thought that human beings or birds were the more cruel it would undoubtedly reply, 'Birds.' Not a pheasant, perhaps, or a grouse, or even a hen, which have their private reasons for thinking ill of human nature; nor even the goldfinch, which is still sometimes put into a cage; but we should almost certainly obtain the votes of the vast majority of the tits and the willow-wrens. Was it not a bird poet who wrote: 'Bird's inhumanity to bird makes countless thousands mourn'? And if we turn to any other family of living creatures we shall find a similar story. The fish is not kind to the fish, nor the insect to the insect. The belief that nature is red in tooth and claw has gone out of fashion, but it is nevertheless true.

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The only animal that is kind to animals is man. There are certain exceptions to this rule, but not more than there are to any other rule.

There is something childlike, indeed, in the way in which human beings make pets of these self-centred and ferocious creatures. We deliberately conceal from ourselves the wickedness of the animals in order that we may find an excuse for sparing their lives. Our cat is a monster : he is not content to capture a sparrow or a mouse and kill it, but will keep it alive in order to amuse himself with its pitiful attempts to escape ; and yet we do not blame him as we should blame a human being who showed equal indifference to the sufferings of a fellow-creature. We may be horrified for the moment, and feel as though we should never wish to speak to a cat again, but the cat has only to walk into the house an hour later with his tail in the air and rub himself purring against our leg, and we can no more resist his blandishments than if he had been a lifelong vegetarian. Our dog may chase a cat, and send it flying up a tree with terror ; but we do not in our hearts reproach him as we should a boy who treated a cat as cruelly. If he bites a stranger, we find excuses for him as we should never find them for a human being who showed a similar propensity. It is as if in the presence of animals we lost something of our critical faculty. And yet we know well enough that animal differs

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from animal as much as human being differs from human being—that there are good dogs and vicious dogs, gentle horses and savage horses, kind bees and cross bees, good-tempered cats and bad-tempered cats. If an animal does wrong, however, we forgive it on the ground that it is only an animal. It would be as reasonable, if a human being does wrong, to forgive him on the ground that he is only a human being. The charitable occasionally do this, but even the charitable too often forget that human beings are little less ignorant than the animals they chase and kill. Certainly, ninety-nine hundredths of cruelty is the result of ignorance. There are people who take the view that the human being who shoots an animal or sets dogs after it does it because he takes pleasure in cruelty, but I doubt if one man in a million who ever killed an animal for sport took any pleasure in the sufferings of the animal. The fox-hunter is no more cruel than his dogs : like them he is a creature of instinct. There are perverted creatures, indeed, to whom cruelty gives pleasure, like the man who was fined the other day for burning a mouse alive. But they are loathed by their fellow-human beings, and, if they are excused, it is only on the ground that they are mad. It may be said by the champions of the animals that no ape has ever been known to burn a mouse alive, but this merely shows that man is more ingenious

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in his cruelty than the other animals, not that he is more cruel. I do not know what form the cruelty of the Torquemadas and the Neros among the apes takes, but we have no reason to believe that these creatures are less monstrous than ourselves. Man is the least beastly of the beasts, whatever the apologists for the animals may say. Not that I think even the beasts are very beastly, but they do many things that shock a human mind. Hence, if we are to rejuvenate ourselves with grafted glands, let them be the glands, not of monkeys, but of human beings. The higher the animal in the scale of development the greater results we may expect from the operation. Let Dr. Voronoff exchange his monkey-farm for a farm of men and women. If there is no hope for our rejuvenation outside his present experiments, most of us will prefer to cultivate the grey hairs of a human being to borrowing the youth of an ape.

XIV. The Sensitive Riviera ♪ ♪

EVERY man, I suppose, feels a certain resentment if strangers criticize or slight his country or the town in which he was born. I do not know whether jokes about Wigan are popular in Wigan, but I am sure that any unjocular disparagement of Wigan would rouse the citizens to a fury of protest. Peebles has its pride as well as Edinburgh. Peacehaven, though young, has already a patriotism of its own and does not suffer mockery gladly. Manchester would become a holy city to thousands of Manchester men and women if it were violently attacked in a London newspaper. We may criticize our own birthplaces, but people from outside must not criticize them. I am myself in this matter one of the most narrow-minded of local patriots. If a stranger visits my native city and speaks well of it his words are honey to my hearing. An actor has only to tell me that he found the audiences there the most intelligent in his experience in order to make me as happy as a purring cat. Praise the beauty of the women, the beauty of the hospitality, the beauty of the hills, and you are my friend for twenty-four hours. On the other hand, should you call the people dour and the town dull and laughterless, as many of the foolish have done, I will detest you as a prig

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who cannot see two inches beyond his foolish nose. The town may have faults, and I will not deny them—at least, I will not deny them until some stranger who knows nothing of the place mentions them. Begin fault-finding, however, and I am ready to swear that it surpasses Florence and Oxford and that Edinburgh is a gloomy gaol compared to it.

Having my fair share of this irrational local patriotism I am able to sympathize with the frenzy that seizes the French Riviera whenever a foreigner expresses an opinion that lets it be seen that he considers it something less than an earthly Paradise. The inhabitants of the Riviera, no doubt, when no strangers are present, admit to each other that it sometimes rains even in the Riviera, and that a wind that might easily be mistaken for the mistral sometimes blows. But it is indecent in a foreigner to say these things. For the foreigner the Riviera should be a place where the sun shines all day and every day—where a beautiful uncriticizable Blue Train drops you on the beautiful uncriticizable coast of a beautiful uncriticizable sea in beautiful uncriticizable weather. If the weather is cold, that is not a thing for foreigners to notice. If the hotel bill seems excessive, ought not a stranger in the circumstances to observe the courtesy of silence? It is the visitor's duty, on going to the Riviera, to polish up his vocabulary of praise, and to

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learn to say ' perfect ', ' wonderful ', ' heavenly ', whatever winds may blow. Luckily for the Riviera, it is possible to use these words there more often than in most parts of Europe, but it is the test of the good visitor to be able to say them even when circumstances do not call for them. No one who cannot believe that it is kingfisher weather while a gale is raging has a right to express an opinion on the Riviera. That, at least, is apparently the opinion of the Riviera Press.

The *Daily News* has recently published an amusing story of the resentment felt at Nice against a journalist on its staff who had the indecency to send a telegram describing rough weather in those parts. The telegram itself was the kind of telegram that would be regarded as fairly innocent in England. Similar telegrams have often been received from Brighton, Worthing and other south-coast resorts, and the newspapers have published them without any suspicion that they were libelling the watering-places of Sussex. ' Rough sea. . . . Waves washed over promenade. . . . Bathing establishment smashed. . . . Traffic impossible.' It is the sort of thing one has read a score of times. So ordinary an item of news did it appear that the *Daily News* did not even publish the telegram. By some means or other, however, the telegram reached the hands of the editors of the Nice newspapers. The editors did not wait to see whether the sensational news appeared in

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print in London. Taking it for granted that no newspaper could regard a rough sea at Nice as a comparatively unimportant matter, they immediately wrote a vehement attack on the *Daily News* correspondent for vilifying their town in the English Press. One of them declared that the correspondent was a man who distinguished himself 'by his persistence and by his clear desire to do harm', and added: 'As the *Daily News* and other important organs of the British Press do not call to reason their singular contributor, we shall have to make up our minds to defend ourselves. If persuasion is not enough, it will remain simply to expel an undesirable journalist from French territory.'

Clearly the editors were not the only people who were outraged by the conduct of a foreign journalist who was base enough to describe a stormy day at Nice. Some other local patriot—was he in the Post Office?—must have been deeply moved in order to transmit a copy of a secret telegram to them. One does not do a thing of this kind unless one feels that great issues are at stake. We who are accustomed to wild weather at the seaside cannot share these emotions. If a telegram appeared in the French Press describing a wet week-end at Southend, we should bear it with equanimity, and not a whisper of protest would be heard in Fleet Street. It seems to us odd that an editor should regard a story of bad weather as libellous if

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published abroad, while the papers of his own locality were allowed to write as the papers of Nice did : ' A veritable tempest descended on our region.' At the same time, as I have said, I have comparable feelings when my own native city is concerned. Perhaps, if I had been born in Nice, I should feel as the Niçois feel.

I think, however, that the Riviera is unreasonably sensitive. It seems to live in a state of perpetual alarm lest visitors should cease to flock to it, and to be so perturbed by this possibility as to regard every one who criticizes this or that aspect of Riviera life as a conspirator plotting against the prosperity of the coast. It sees in every such criticism (to quote the Nice editor) a ' clear desire to do harm '. It cannot believe that a journalist would write : ' It is raining here to-day,' except from an evil motive. I myself once wrote some articles on the Riviera with an ecstatic twirl in every other sentence, but, on arriving at Monte Carlo and seeing the wretched butchery of pigeon-shooting on the front, wrote an article describing what is to many visitors a disgusting spectacle. No sooner was it published than a Frenchman interested in the development of the Riviera rang up one of my friends to protest excitedly. ' Why did he write such an article ? ' he groaned. ' It will keep English people away from the Riviera. I know. He's been got at. He's been got at by the English railway companies.

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I have proof that the English railways are organizing a campaign against the Riviera in their own interests.' To him it was clearly inconceivable that a journalist should express his dislike of shooting trapped pigeons except either from malice or for hire. The French, more than most nations, perhaps, are inclined to look for a motive that is not there.

On the whole, however, I am afraid that human beings all the world over are becoming increasingly sensitive to what other people say of them and their country and their affairs. Possibly we are approaching a time when most countries will censor all the news that leaves them for the outside world, and a foreign correspondent will have as little liberty to express his opinions as he has to-day in Russia or in Italy. Nations, like business men, have begun to believe in publicity, and they hate anything to appear in print about them that is not as free from censure as an advertisement. They are so short-sighted that they do not see that the more they silence criticism, the more they are criticized. If Mussolini allowed freedom of criticism there would be far less criticism of Mussolini. It is, I agree, a great compliment to journalists to believe that what even the least of us writes is a matter of world-shaking importance. But we ourselves know that the world is very difficult to shake with words, and that Fascism, Bolshevism, Prohibition and all

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the rest of it continue in spite of our printed wisdom. A Cowes shopkeeper once wrote to me to say that I had injured Cowes by writing an article on the tedium of yacht-racing, but Cowes still flourishes. Critics attacked Marie Corelli for twenty years, but Marie Corelli was more widely read than any of her critics. Every newspaper in England has printed denunciations of those who scatter litter over the countryside and on the heaths and in the parks, but litter continues to be scattered. This is not to say that criticism has no effect at all ; but it has not one-hundredth of the effect attributed to it by those who resent it. Certainly, I never heard of anyone who gave up a holiday on the Riviera because he had been told by a cynic that it sometimes rained there. Nor is it likely that there has been more than a dozen people who have refused a chance of visiting Spain because they had read a description of bull-fighting.

It was an unlucky day for the human race when somebody or other said : ' The pen is mightier than the sword.' Ever since he did so, the world has been haunted by the fear of the man with a pen in his hand, and on the Riviera the pen is evidently regarded as a lethal weapon. In Italy it is kept on a chain like a dog. Being a journalist I do not share this dread. I would gladly give journalists the liberty to write whatever they please so long as they do not attack my native city.

XV. Smoking in the House ♪ ♪

‘HONOURABLE Members are reminded’—so runs a notice posted up in the precincts of the House of Commons by order of the Speaker—‘that smoking and the carrying of lighted cigars, cigarettes, etc., in the lobbies and corridors and on the staircases of the House are strictly forbidden.’ The order, it appears, was issued merely with the object of lessening the risk of fire or of damage to floors and carpets in the House, but the *Morning Post* is not content with so utilitarian a reason, and takes the view that, even if it were not necessary to prohibit smoking for the sake of safety, it should be prohibited for the sake of decorum. ‘No one who has watched the proceedings of Parliament,’ it declares, ‘can doubt that there has been something more than a mere relaxation of manners—there has been a degeneration’; and it continues a couple of sentences later: ‘The days when it was the thing for Members to return to the House after dinner in evening dress have long passed. . . . But even in this democratic age, when Members habitually wear lounge suits and bowler hats, there should be a limit, and the habit of smoking in the approaches to the House should clearly be beyond the limit.’

It is one of the happiest illusions of the

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conservatively-minded that their ancestors used to behave with decorum, and that the dead were extraordinarily dignified while they were alive. There is, as a rule, no justification for this belief except the sentiment of the past. It is impossible to dip into any history of the Houses of Parliament without coming on descriptions of scenes that 'in this democratic age' would create a scandal. I opened one such history, and almost the first sentence that met my eye was: 'In the Restoration period the proceedings of the House of Commons were not infrequently stained by drunken orgies,' and the author quotes in illustration a sentence from Pepys's *Diary*: 'Told how Sir Allan Brodrick and Sir Allen Apsley did come the other day into the House, and did both speak for half an hour together, and could not either be pulled or bid to sit down and hold their peace, to the great contempt of the King's servants and cause.' Whatever else they may have been, it is unlikely that Sir Allan and Sir Allen were democrats. More than a century later, Pitt's habit of arriving at the House fuddled with port was a theme for rhyming wits, and everybody knows the story of the occasion on which, during a speech of Fox's, he had to retire behind the Speaker's chair to be sick and on which he held the door open so that, even while being sick, he might be able to follow Fox's argument. Later still, in the early part of the nineteenth

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century, Sir George Rose, a wealthy and dignified country gentleman, 'turned in drunk one evening . . . and called on Mr. Speaker for a comic song'. 'When he was called upon to beg the Speaker's pardon,' writes Mr. Michael MacDonagh, 'he avowed hard and fast that he would beg no man's pardon, not even King George's, and certainly not that little chap's with the big wig.'

It may be thought, however, that apart from drunkenness—which was then less a breach of decorum than it is at present—the well-dressed Members of the House of Commons behaved in those days like perfect gentlemen. The more we read about them, unfortunately, the more shocking their behaviour seems to us. I take it that it is one of the established rules of good manners that no gentleman will eat an orange in company except at the table. Yet in the great days of the House of Commons, before a democratic age had made an end of dignity, Members of Parliament were to be seen openly sucking oranges on the benches of the House. 'In the great days of Burke and Pitt, and Fox and Sheridan'—again I quote Mr. MacDonagh—'Members used to lie full length along the benches, amusing themselves sucking oranges and cracking nuts.' Cobbett and O'Connell used to suck oranges together, while jeering rudely at the speeches of their enemies. Joseph Hume came to the House with his pockets filled

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with pears, and used to munch these as he listened to the debates. Fruit continued to be eaten in this ultra-democratic fashion till the middle of the nineteenth century, and Cobden has left a description of a Member who delivered a fierce attack on him in the House, while 'Colonel Sibthorpe plied the fellow with oranges to suck, in an affectionate way that resembled a monkey fondling a bear'. I doubt if even the *Morning Post* would advocate the revival of this disgusting custom of carpophagy. There is, as it wisely remarks, a limit.

As for manners in general, the present House of Commons has little to learn from an age in which spirited young Members organized a campaign to howl Burke down, and it is probable that language unbecoming a gentleman was as common at Westminster during the triumph of aristocracy as it has been since the day on which Keir Hardie entered the house wearing a 'deer-stalker'.

On the general question of smoking in the House and in its precincts, I agree with the *Morning Post*, though I should find it difficult to give a good reason for doing so. In reason, I can see no objection to Mr. Baldwin's smoking a pipe on the front bench or to Mr. Ramsay MacDonald's tempering the tedium of a debate with a cigarette. There is nothing inherently undignified in smoking. The greatest statesmen and the greatest soldiers nearly all smoke,

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and we think none the worse of them for it. Half a century ago it was thought decorous to smoke in the home but indecorous to smoke in the street, but to-day a prince or a prime minister may smoke in public without forfeiting the good opinion even of the old-fashioned. We smoke at banquets ; we smoke at committee-meetings ; we smoke, when we are allowed, in the theatre and concert-hall. Smoking has become a part of our lives almost like breathing, and the clergy smoke, if anything, more than the rest of us. It is obviously only a convention that forbids us to smoke in this place or that. Obeying this convention, we refrain from smoking in church, in the law-court, and in the Houses of Parliament. Originally the convention may have been founded on good manners—the good manners that forbid us to do what may be annoying to a great many other people. But smoking annoys very few people nowadays, and would certainly annoy fewer in the House of Commons than it annoys in a theatre. Hence the only valid reason for prohibiting smoking in the House no longer exists.

The reasons, indeed, are all on the other side. If smoking were permitted in the House of Commons, it is almost certain that the work of the House would be performed with greater efficiency. Members permitted to smoke would attend the debates more regularly, and would listen to their opponents with greater patience.

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They would also make shorter speeches, knowing that they had only to sit down in order to enjoy a smoke. There would be fewer scenes, for a man with a pipe or cigarette in his mouth will not waste his time in howling. I am inclined to think that many of the scenes that have disgraced the House of Commons have been due to the irritability which results from temporary abstinence from tobacco. If at the outbreak of such a scene the Speaker would rise from his chair and say, 'Gentlemen, you may smoke,' storm, I am confident, would give way to calm, and the most raucous throat would be silenced. As for the Speaker himself, if any man deserves to be permitted to smoke at his work, it is he. He is the least enviable man on earth, condemned to listen hour after hour to speeches not one in fifty of which could give any human being pleasure. If I were Speaker, I am sure I should go mad under the strain and shout interruptions during the speeches of honourable Members. But not if I were allowed to smoke. If I were allowed to smoke, Members might, for all I should care, go on talking about foot-and-mouth disease or whatever subject they liked best till cockcrow.

And yet, as I have said, I agree with the *Morning Post* that smoking should be forbidden in the House of Commons. If Members of Parliament were allowed to smoke at their work, the reputation of Parliament would

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undoubtedly suffer. We all love formality in the great affairs of the world, and tobacco is the enemy of formality. We could not endure to see a bishop opening a new cathedral with a cigar in his mouth, because the informality of his behaviour would destroy the noble formality of the occasion. We demand a certain pomp in the Church as in the law, and we like a bishop or a judge to be not merely himself but his office ; and offices do not smoke. The less we think of bishops and judges and Members of Parliament as men like ourselves, the more we respect them. Hence we insist on their wearing the uniform of staid behaviour. They may indulge in the pleasures of food, drink and tobacco in private, but in public they must appear as demi-gods without appetites or as like demi-gods as they can. Indulgence in food or tobacco destroys the illusion of their dignity, just as it would destroy the illusion of Romeo's dignity if he were to appear under Juliet's balcony smoking a cigarette or eating an apple. Heroes eat and smoke, but not on such occasions. At heart we are probably all Puritans and feel the greatest respect for our fellow-men in their moments of abstinence. That is why it is likely that England will for a long time continue to be governed by a Parliament of non-smokers.

XVI. A Derby Day Diary ~ ~

HOW I loathe going to the Derby ! It is eight o'clock in the morning of Derby Day, and who could be so gross as to be attracted by pleasure at eight o'clock in the morning ? How I wish it would rain in torrents so that I might have an excuse for not going, or, at least, for not getting up, which is the necessary preliminary to going ! And yet who could wish it to rain with all those good-natured people looking forward to a happy day on Epsom Downs ? If only it could rain in London and not at Epsom ! As it is, I don't care if I never set eyes on a bookie again. As I lie here in bed I honestly detest betting. If the secretary of the Anti-Gambling League called round at the present moment, I should give him a large subscription. The right time to preach virtue, I am sure, is before eleven o'clock in the morning. I do not know of a single Commandment that I would stir from my pillow to break before nine. The day, however, looks as if it is going to be loathsomely fine, and, anyhow, breakfast is getting cold. Odious haddock. This is no hour of the day to be eating haddock. . . .

It still threatens to be hideously fine as I set out. A fool rushing out of a side street nearly wrecks the car in which I am being sulkily

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borne along. A typical early riser, I do not remember having been out so early since I was in Italy and had to catch a train at Florence. London looks curiously indifferent to the Derby. Every one, no doubt, feels as resentful about it as I do. The Derby ought to be run in the evening, like dog-races. Few of these people, however, have the same cause for resentment as I have, for I have not only had to get up at eight, but I have to write this article and deliver it before seven o'clock this evening. I shall have no time to see the race, but I shall have to scribble the article on my knee in the car while all the other people are enjoying themselves. We are now on an arterial road, a rather dull procession of cars, with one cyclist pushing along among them. He is a respectable elderly man, bareheaded and in spectacles ; and above his head he carries a text of Scripture in large lead-pencilled letters, and beneath the text the question, ' What Are You Going to Do About It ? ' I cannot help liking the little gentleman. He may be rather mad, but he obviously means well by us. No doubt, he believes that in going to the Derby we are being consciously wicked. There he is wrong. I was never more consciously virtuous in my life. There are still people, however, who regard racecourses, public-houses and theatres as haunts of vice. They are people with romantic imaginations, who believe the human

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race is a great deal wickeder than it really is. I admit that the driver of the charabanc who has just cut in and nearly torn the mudguard off my car is as wicked as the most evangelical cyclist could imagine him. I am sorry to say he has now drawn up at a public-house. I had thought him a vicious-looking teetotaller. How pleasant in comparison is the girl in the roofed horse-cart who is carrying two rhubarb-sticks and fanning her face with the leaves when she is not waving them at young men in taxis! Still, as the wise say, one swallow does not make a summer, and the road on the whole is dull compared to the old road of horse and donkey and bicycle that used to be the most amusing part of Derby Day. I never saw the old road at its best, for, on the first occasion on which I went to the Derby, there were already motor-cars destroying the colour and variety of the traffic. To-day one might as well be in the Strand, except that the police are regulating the traffic so perfectly that there is scarcely even a block till we get to Epsom. The motor-car is all very well as an invention, but it has ruined Derby Day. . . .

Behind the stands at the racecourse it is, for the most part, merely the merry-go-round at Piccadilly Circus transferred to Epsom Downs. A number of men are winding their way through the crowd carrying sandwich-boards with more Scripture-texts and mottoes such as 'Where

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Will You Spend Eternity ? ' A tipster, described on his board as England's Premier Turf Adviser, is addressing a circle of fellow-creatures disinclined to believe him. Beer, oranges, and cakes are on sale at booths. Beyond the stands hundreds of motor-buses are drawn up abreast with their roofs crowded with sightseers. Pedlars push their faces in at the windows of passing cars, shouting, ' You're looking well to-day,' in the hope of selling their wares by means of a compliment. We reach Tattenham Corner and cross the course in search of a parking-place on the hill inside the horse-shoe. We are led up to the top of the hill by a young gipsy who demands half a sovereign and leaves us in a corner from which it will be possible to see very little. Gipsy women make their rounds, saying, ' You have a winning face,' and begging. It is very difficult to write with a man standing beside the car and shouting, ' Choc'-lats ! Chocol'tes 're lovely,' as if he were selling coal in the street. A brass band has now arrived and is playing a waltz-tune. I like waltz-tunes, but not while I am sitting in a car on Epsom Downs and trying to write an article. The youth with the cloth round his neck who is in charge of an extemporized wigwam of a lavatory made of a few sticks and sail-cloth, and keeps continually shouting, ' Accomodytion. Come on in, genoelmen ; come on in ' is disturbing to peaceful authorship. A scoundrel

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with a mandoline has just begun to yell at the back of the car a song that runs like :

Con-*stan*-ti-*no*-ple,

C-O-N-S-T-A-N-T-I-N-O-P-L-E,

Con-*stan*-ti-*no*-ple,

It's as easy to spell as to say your A B C.

The day is beautifully warm with islands of cloud floating in a blue sky, and hills lying peacefully in the haze visible beyond the mob on the slopes and the tower down which people slide on a mat for twopence. Aeroplanes are roaring overhead, advertising newspapers that ought to know better than to be disturbing a journalist at his work. The first race is now about to begin. I stand up in the car, but I can see no horses. I can see thousands of human beings, hundreds of motor-buses, more hundreds of motor-cars, a number of trees, a great many scraps of paper thrown on the grass by lunchers, bookmakers, tic-tac men waving their arms ; but not a horse is in sight. I haven't had time to make a bet, but I have played the part of turf adviser, and the family money is on King's Parade. Evidently the race has begun, for I can see people who are obviously looking at something that is happening. I find myself feeling curiously excited. I long to see so much as a jockey's cap above the heads of the distant crowd. Suddenly I see a little heat-wave of

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jockeys' caps vibrating fast over the heads of the crowd at an incredible speed. I can distinguish the colour of the caps, but I cannot for the life of me remember what is the colour of the cap I wish to win. I dare not take my eyes from the caps to look at the race-card, but some one behind me says, 'Chocolate.' I see a chocolate cap just ahead whenever I can see anything. The horses are now flying round Tattenham Corner, and for a hundred yards both the jockeys and the animals are visible. The chocolate cap above a black shirt with red sleeves is being hotly pursued by a cap of another colour, with a long string of galloping animals tailing away behind them. They disappear behind a motor-bus. The race is over, but who knows who has won? There is no shouting audible, so it cannot have been King's Parade, the favourite. By some secret process the news spreads, even to the distant corner of the heath. King's Parade *has* won.

I continue to write. How quiet everybody is, except the people who are making noises for money! You would never dream that these people strolling about among the litter on the grass cared who was going to win the Derby. I don't very much care myself, but I have backed Gang Warily, because it was mentioned to me with the most knowing look in the world; and I have backed Royal Minstrel, because I dreamt that Homer had won the race, and

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Royal Minstrel is more like Homer than any of the other horses in the race; and I have expressed my intention of backing Felstead. Last night, on arriving home, I spoke of Felstead, and a member of my family who found Sansovino in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* on the eve of one Derby, and Manna in a book by Mr. Osbert Sitwell on the eve of another, said, 'That's very curious, I was turning out some old papers to-day and found this.' It was a scrap of paper giving the name and address of a doctor whom she had been advised to consult. The doctor's name was as near Felstead as the Swedish language can get. This morning, unfortunately, we were in too big a hurry, and I was in too vile a temper, to ring up my bookmaker before starting. I mentioned the horse to the man who was driving us down, and he said: 'That's very curious; I have dreamt for the last two nights that I wanted to go to a place in Kent called Felstead.' He has just volunteered to send a telegram to my bookmaker if I wish to back the horse. I bet so seldom that I have forgotten the bookmaker's telegraphic address. I remember what I can of it, however, and dispatch the telegram. Now that I have backed Felstead, I feel certain that Fairway is going to win, but I refuse to back the favourite. I am writing so hard that I have no time to learn by heart the colours of the different jockeys on the horses, and, when I stand up in

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the car to watch the race, my eyes are so be-dazzled with sunshine on paper that I cannot see very clearly. Once more the little heat-wave of coloured caps vibrates at terrific speed beyond the heads of the crowd. Some one on the roof of a taxi shouts ' Good old Gordon ! ' and I resign myself to a victory of Gordon Richards on Sunny Trace. The heads and shoulders of the jockeys appear, and I would swear Lord Derby's cap is among the first of them. I tremble with excitement. I would give my gold presentation pencil to see what is happening. There is such shouting as the horses approach Tattenham Corner that I say : ' Sunny Trace must be winning.' The horses are now in full view as they enter the far side of the horse-shoe course. But they might as well be so many pots of different coloured paint for all I can make of them and their riders. I am sure Flamingo is near the front, for I have noticed his jockey's gold cap, but the rest of the horses as they gallop past the roaring crowds are merely an immensely exciting abracadabra. They disappear behind the same motor-bus as before, and the end of the race takes place out of sight. I get out and walk among the crowd, where everybody is asking everybody else, ' What won ? ' A woman says, ' Gang Warily,' but I do not believe her. After a minute or so, a bookmaker chalks up on his board the numbers 3, 15, 14. I look at my race-card and see that

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number 3 is Felstead. I smile, but everybody around me is so quiet that I do not feel elated. I feel that, even if Felstead was first, there may be an objection to him, and that, even if there is no objection, I may have put the wrong address on the telegram. I shall not know whether I did or not till I get home and look up the bookmaker's book of rules. Still I have a curious sensation of having won the Battle of Trafalgar or something of the kind. Most people make fools of themselves when they back dreams, but this dream has undoubtedly come true. I wish I knew what my dream about Homer meant. I'm sorry I didn't put more money on Felstead. Suppose I had had £100 on him at 33 to 1? Suppose. . . . But what's the use of supposing? I have done well enough. I wish I hadn't this article to finish, so that I could get out of the car and enjoy myself. How delightfully that brass band is playing! What a beautiful day it is! You would never believe that a day like this could have begun with such an hour as eight o'clock in the morning.

XVII. A Society of Protesters



THERE are so many people protesting against so many different things nowadays that I am sure the protests collide with one another and greatly hamper one another's chances of being effective. Turn where you will, you will see a protesting figure. The correspondence columns of the newspapers are full of their helpless gesticulations. I open one paper and I find a protest against reckless driving, a protest against long-distance air flights, a protest against the lack of birth-control among dogs, a protest against the present rent restrictions, a protest against the prices paid by the middleman to the grower for apples. I open another paper and I discover a protest against the memorials in Westminster Abbey, a protest against Dean Inge's attack on the English physique, a protest against Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson's criticism of the films, a protest against the division between Liberalism and Labour. Open other newspapers and you will read innumerable protests against the dole, protests against greyhound racing, protests against the totalisator, protests against split infinitives, protests against the inefficiency of the telephone, protests against the price of lemons, protests against the behaviour of the

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modern girl, protests against the people who protest against the behaviour of the modern girl, protests against the B.B.C., protests against blood sports, protests against the behaviour of pedestrians, protests against the behaviour of the people who run over pedestrians, protests against the quality of the paper used in the manufacture of cigarettes, protests against the new Prayer Book, protests against the constitution of the Indian Commission, protests against the number of pigeons frequenting St. Paul's, protests against any attempt to diminish the number of pigeons frequenting St. Paul's, protests against the costliness of the passport system, protests against the small amount of income tax relief allowed to fathers of families, protests against the motion that married men should be given relief at the expense of bachelors—— But if one tried to enumerate the things against which newspaper readers protest even in the course of a single year, one would find oneself writing a book. The truth is, we are suffering from a congestion of protests. They are so numerous that in self-defence we have to learn to become deaf to them, or we should be able to attend to nothing else. It is as though there were too much indignation in the world—so much, indeed, that we have gradually become almost indignation-proof. We lose hope of seeing any but a tiny proportion of these barbed protests, aimed

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so wildly and so confusedly, ever hitting the mark. And when we lose hope we lose serious interest. In the end we read most of the letters of protest in the papers merely for entertainment.

The growing inefficiency of the protest is to my mind an unfortunate sign of the times. There are so many things that ought to be protested against, and so few that even a widespread popular protest seems likely to destroy. It is true that in recent years we have had one or two examples of effective protests. We had an effective protest against the destruction of Waterloo Bridge; we had an effective protest against the sale of the City churches; we had an effective protest only the other day against the continued imprisonment of Oscar Slater. But protests for the most part are like seed sown so thickly that few of them ever come up. They choke the life out of each other owing to their number. As a result, we who have the normal love of protesting against things no longer protest with the same confidence. How, indeed, is it possible to have much confidence when we see all the things we have protested against for years flourishing as splendidly as though the sun of universal approbation had shone on them? We have protested against D.O.R.A. for instance—protested with anger, ridicule and contempt—protested in the name of Labour, Liberalism and Conservatism—and

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D.O.R.A. is as safe from our protests as the moon from a shower of stones flung at it by a demented schoolboy. Every one admits that D.O.R.A. is an imbecile, unfit to govern the lives of grown-up men and women. If protests could kill, D.O.R.A. would have been dead long ago. But protests can no longer kill. D.O.R.A. continues to instruct us when we may buy chocolates and when we may not, and to warn us not to buy cigarettes from a human being, though we may buy them from a machine, at certain hours of the evening. Mr. Guedalla suggests that, if this sort of thing goes on, we may find men protesting not in words but in deeds against such absurdities, as men protest against Prohibition in America. 'Bootleggers,' he prophesies, 'will hawk caramels at prohibited hours; masked pie-merchants will sell their contraband from concealed addresses; umbrella rings will be obtainable by knocking three times on the counter; and if we know the password, we shall be able to obtain post cards—and even mineral waters—at the most unholy hours.' It is possible that a protest carried out on these practical lines might be successful, and it is probable that, if there were an absolute prohibition of the sale of caramels, cigarettes and mineral waters, the protest would take this form. As it is, however, the protest would give us even more trouble than D.O.R.A. gives us. D.O.R.A. interferes with our convenience rather

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than with our liberty to eat what we like, smoke what we like, and drink what we like. She is an insult to the intelligence rather than to human freedom. No man, not even the bravest, would give his life in order to make an end of D.O.R.A., because she is not worth it. That, perhaps, is one reason why our protests are so ineffective.

And yet, I think, there must be some way discoverable of making protests effective. If it is true that the multitude of protests hinders the effectiveness of all protests, surely we could do something to diminish their number or at least to regulate them in such a way as to clear the road for this protest or for that. I should like to see all the people who write to the newspapers uniting into a great Society of Protesters, which would take as its motto, 'One at a time,' and submitting their protests to a central committee which would decide which protest should for the moment be given precedence. Every member of the society would be bound to give his support to whichever protest it was decided to further, and he in turn could claim the support of all his fellow-members for his own protest. Thus the man who protested against the high price of potatoes in restaurants and the man who protested against giving money to carol-singers would for the moment cease to beat the air in favour of their pet projects and throw themselves vehemently on the side of the

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man who was protesting against the seizure of the Surrey commons by the War Office, supposing that were the cause to which the Society of Protesters had given precedence. All through the country all other protests except protests against the War Office would be silenced. The country would ring with one loud corporate cry of protest to which even Cabinet Ministers could not avoid listening. No longer would the authorities look smilingly on while this protest and that destroyed each other like Kilkenny cats. They would feel that anything was better, even the most abject submission, than to be perpetually deafened by this monotonous clamour, and they would abjectly submit. One protest having succeeded in this fashion, the Society of Protesters would carry through the next protest with double courage. This might be a protest against allowing motorists and motor cyclists to leave the roads and destroy the loneliness of the Downs. Or it might be a protest against litter or against those 'bungaloid' growths which, as Dean Inge has said, are at present more and more defacing the beauty of the country. Let the protesters of the world unite, and there is not a single matter on which they will not be able to bring the strongest government to its knees. I wish the man who protests against the price of potatoes in restaurants could realize that he is far more likely to further his cause by joining temporarily

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in a protest against the pronunciation of modern actors or some similar protest than by for ever harping on his wretched potatoes. He must surely see that the queue system works excellently at railway-station booking-offices and at turnstiles, and that protests also would gain considerably from taking their places in a queue. I hope that, if such a queue is ever formed, the protest against D.O.R.A. will be somewhere near the head of it. The protest against D.O.R.A. could get through the turnstile easily enough if it were not for the squash. Hence I should like to raise the cry: 'Protesters of the world, unite!' If you do, the last stroke of the last midnight of 1929 will not have sounded before Englishmen have established their right to buy pie or pipe tobacco at any hour of the day or night as they please.

XVIII. Happy England



‘ENGLAND,’ said my friend, ‘in spite of everything, is probably a happier country to-day than it has ever been in its history.’ The sun was shining at the moment, a lark was singing above a buttercup meadow with a stream winding through it, and an invisible cuckoo was shouting over a distant wood ; but even so I wondered if he could be serious. I do not object to a man’s saying that people are happier to-day than they were in the Middle Ages, or while Henry VIII was reforming religion, or while Oliver Cromwell was reforming the reformed religion of Henry VIII, or at any other period until the last quarter of the nineteenth century ; but the notion that the world had improved within living memory was so novel to me that, if the sun had not been so pleasantly warm, and the wind on our brows so pleasantly cool, I should have dismissed it with derision. Who that has once been young and now is middle-aged can have failed to observe the steady deterioration of the world in so far as men and women have altered it ? I do not wish to indict the present age, but it is an age that has invaded *our* peaceful age with garish petrol pumps, with the odious odours of motor-bicycles, with bungalows, with the dance-music

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of St. Vitus, with charabancs, with doubts, with psycho-analysis, with high taxation, with standardization of everything from tobacco to opinions, with advertisement and self-advertisement, with paint and powder, with prohibitions more puzzling than the riddle of the Sphinx, with—— But, even if I continued the catalogue for a column, it would be impossible to convey to an inhabitant of the present age what an inhabitant of a past age thinks of all the changes that have come over the world since Queen Victoria celebrated her Jubilee. The very faces in the streets of one's native town have changed, so that, if one returns to it, it is as if one were visiting a foreign city. The farms that one knew as a boy are no longer in the possession of the same farmers, or even of their families, and, if one opened the gate into the Causeway Field to-day, one would do so with the feeling that one was an intruder. Everywhere the present has conquered the past with those two terrible weapons, mortality and machinery. Happy? Why, when one was young, one could be happy in memory, in the present (because it was even better than memory), and in anticipation (because the future was going to be better still). To-day who can pretend that the things we see about us are better than the things we remember? Who but an optimist can take pleasure in looking forward to the world as it will be when it has become even worse than it is to-day :

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a world of empty churches and empty inns, of overbuilt fields and traffic-blocks in every country lane, of cinemas instead of theatres, of flats instead of houses, of machines instead of men and horses and birds and, possibly, even of cats and dogs ?

Still the sun was shining, and the youth of the village, all glorious in white, were playing cricket on the green. It was not very good cricket. The batsmen hit the ball hard as you could have wished, but they usually hit it into somebody's hands. The bowlers rushed towards the wicket like angry bulls, but the balls they bowled would have been harmless enough if the batsmen had not so longed to sweep them over the hedges. The fielders stood about in all kinds of attitudes—some like jumping frogs, some like tigers about to spring, some like indolent human beings—but, even though the balls sailed straight towards their hands like gifts from Heaven, they were just as likely to miss them as to catch them. Yet, somehow, in the warm sun, with the spectators lying in the grass and applauding not without jocularly each new batsman as he came out in huge pads that gave him the stiff appearance of a knight in armour, only to whirl a bat a few times wildly round him and then to creep back slowly towards the pavilion, one could not help feeling that here, if anywhere in time or space, was happiness without a shadow. As we drove

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on at a sauntering pace through the village, it was difficult to observe any traces of those devastating passions and ruinous miseries of which the realistic novelists of the countryside write. Women stood by the gates of their cottages, enjoying the sun like cats. Old men with sticks gazed benevolently on the traffic of the roads. Children stooped with uncertain joints to pick pieces of paper or stick off the ground and show them proudly to mothers who did not beat them for it. The kindness of the sunshine was on every face. It was as obvious to the eye as the apple-blossom in the gardens. There was a petrol-pump by the side of the road, but, after all, one might need patrol. There were one or two new houses, but there were enough of the old left to give the place an air of permanence. Tulips swayed in the breeze : the wistaria was coming into blossom : the wallflowers in the gardens, even if one could not smell them, filled the air with the idea of fragrance. 'How happy a world,' thought I, 'in which one can leave town on a Saturday morning and drive through a remote unspoiled village like this ! Are we all right for petrol ? ' I asked my companion.

Nor, as we drove on, did we come on any sight or sound that contradicted the impression of universal happiness. If we paused under a larch in a country lane, there would be a wood-wren singing in it, and, though the song of the

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wood-wren is always the same, with a plaintive opening that suddenly dances into a tiny melody of reassurance, it has still for those of us who know as little about birds as I do the charm of rare and refreshing novelty. Farther on we stop again and a whitethroat is springing into the air and, as if feeling giddy, tumbling hurriedly down again into a copse of birches, and it is singing as no whitethroat ever sang before. I do not wish to say a word in criticism of the ordinary whitethroat, but it must be admitted that it sings as though it were explaining that it had lost its voice. But this particular whitethroat sang notes that would not have disgraced a blackcap. In the books about birds I have read of good whitethroats compared with bad whitethroats, of good blackcaps compared with bad blackcaps, even of good nightingales compared with bad nightingales, but as a rule I cannot make any of these distinctions for myself, and, if a bird of any species is singing, I accept it and applaud it as the representative singer of its species. Yet, after hearing this whitethroat on Saturday, I foresee a new interest in life, and the possibility of comparing bird with its fellow-bird as we compare one tenor with another. Not that any bird sings so badly as a bad tenor sings. I doubt if there is any bird, however poor a performer, whose song has never given a single human being pleasure.

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The singing of birds, indeed, has many advantages over the singing of human beings. One is that every bird can sing its own song while other birds are singing other songs all around it, and that yet, as we listen, we have no impression of disharmony. The nightingale, the thrush, the blackbird, the willow-wren, the chaffinch, the hedge-sparrow, the yellow-hammer, the robin, the wren, the lark, the cuckoo, and the blackcap may all be singing at the same time, with jays shrieking and rooks cawing, and green woodpeckers whinnying; yet there is nothing that grates on the ear, nothing that seems to break the blessed peace of the countryside. Imagine, on the other hand, even a score or two of human beings travelling along a country lane in a charabanc, each singing his or her own song, one person singing 'I Don't Want to Go Home', another 'John Brown's Body', another 'White Wings that Never Grow Weary', another 'Never the Same Girl', another a hymn, another the Jewel-song from 'Faust', another the Frothblowers' Anthem, another '*Voi che Sapete*', and so on, and you will realize what a Gehenna of noise the world would be if human beings sang in the same individualistic fashion as birds. Is it that their voices are uglier than those of birds, and that we can tolerate them only when they are subjected to the stern discipline of law? I myself doubt if nature meant human beings to

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sing ; and that this is the general opinion is shown by our dislike of hearing people singing as they drive through country villages, or as they walk home at night through the London streets. If they had voices like the birds, we should assuredly encourage them to sing from charabancs, and the man who sang on his way home after midnight would ravish our hearts like a nightingale. On Saturday, fortunately, not a single human being was singing, whereas every bird was.

And so through the woods, where every fern was opening its little fists in the sun among the shadows, and on to the next village, where the bridge over the stream is like a bridge in the garden of a doll's house, past lilac and laburnum, with every individual leaf on every tree seeming to be steeped in the sunny pleasure of the day. And then another village green and more cricketers playing more bad cricket. It was impossible not to believe that this was the best of all possible worlds, for a world in which young men enjoy playing bad cricket is clearly a far happier place than a world in which young men would enjoy playing only good cricket. Then tea. Who, sitting down to tea after hours spent in country sunshine, can fail to tell himself that he is living in a far more fortunate period than either the age of Pericles or the Middle Ages ? Who would willingly turn the hands of the clock back to a

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time before tea had been brought into Europe ? Sentimentalists who put Merrie England in the Middle Ages surely forgot that Merrie England was a tea-less England and by so much the less merry than England to-day. Then more sunshine, sweet-brier at the gateway into a field, apple-petals circulating in a gentle whirl on the horse-pond in the breeze, more cuckoos, long-tailed tits, violets, stitchwort, bluebells, ground ivy, a turkey-cock gobbling, geese hissing and honking at the passers-by, cows, hens, japonica, dinner, twilight, and darkness. Then a full moon rising slowly behind a wooded hill, and, as the light spreads, a nightingale that had been silent in the chill of the evening sings in a tree almost above the small firelit panes of the farmhouse window. It is still singing when one goes to bed after midnight. It is still singing when one goes to sleep at two. It is still singing when one wakes at four. A day of sun and lilacs and sweetbrier, of moon and tree-shadows and nightingales. It is impossible at such a time to contradict anyone who maintains that this is the happiest period of history. To-day it is an excellent world in which to be alive, and a very excellent world in which to fall asleep.

XIX. Celebrities

‘**R**EALLY,’ says Mr. Bernard Shaw, ‘I think the world has gone mad about celebrities.’ Certainly celebrities have never previously been celebrated as they are celebrated to-day. Two thousand years ago a celebrity was, I suppose, a man whose name and appearance were known to about two thousand people—or, at most, to twenty thousand people. I am certain that the ordinary European of Julius Caesar’s day had never heard of him. Even most of the people who died as a result of his curious ambition would probably not have recognized him if they had met him on the field of battle. There were no newspapers, no photographs, no films in those days to send a man’s fame and features round the earth. Pericles during his lifetime was an obscure statesman compared with Mr. Winston Churchill in his. Homer, had he foreseen it, might well have envied Mr. Michael Arlen his fame. Alexander the Great, if he were living to-day, would weep, not because there were no more worlds to conquer, but because there were no more papers in which his photograph could appear. It is true that the fame of the ancients has survived—that Agamemnon and the Gracchi and Scipio, and even Nero, are still

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known to us, in spite of the deplorable absence of contemporary press paragraphs and photographs. But how bitterly some of them—Nero especially—would have resented it if they had realized that, owing to an unkindly fate, they were born centuries before the invention of these universal propagandists of fame!

There is, I think, somewhere in Horace a description of the pleasure felt by a poet in being pointed out as a famous man by the finger of the passer-by. But a cinema-star to-day would smile at so narrow a conception of fame. Horace, indeed, was probably known and pointed out by a handful of intelligent people in the street of a small town not much larger than Wigan—certainly not as large as Liverpool. (To scholars who protest that this remark is evidence of my ignorance of the population of ancient Rome I would reply that, on the contrary, it is evidence, at the worst, of my ignorance of the population of Wigan.) Had Horace travelled a hundred miles from Rome, it is very unlikely that he would have met anybody who had ever heard of him. He may have been somebody among the somebodies of Rome, but he was nobody among the nobodies of the rest of Europe. That is where ancient fame differed from fame in the modern world. To-day a man may be nobody among the somebodies of London and yet be somebody among the nobodies of five continents.

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Whether the celebrity of the present day is any happier than the famous man—or the man who thought he was famous—of previous centuries is a question to which I do not know the answer. Celebrity, like fame, is a relative term, and the most celebrated man, as well as the most famous man, is a hero within a circle. Possibly, the excitement of being a hero within a small circle is quite as intoxicating as the excitement of being a hero within a large one. A Methodist minister whose jokes are the success of a single Sunday-school soirée may conceivably taste the pleasures of being appreciated as exquisitely as Charlie Chaplin, whose jokes are the success of twenty thousand towns and villages. The batsman whose century wins a match for Puddleton-Super-Mare against Pitching-on-the-Marsh may enjoy an incense of applause that Hobbs himself never knows. Celebrity is probably rather like wine : no man can really enjoy more than a small amount of it. Obviously, men can stand more celebrity than wine, but whether they can go on enjoying it is another matter. How many men who in their youth were excited to the point of inebriation by the bare mention of their names in the *Godalming Sentinel* throw their press-cuttings unread into the wastepaper-basket twenty years later ! The more unknown a man is, the more he enjoys being known. The better known he is—but that would not be

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quite true. Still, the famous men who are most interested in their press-cuttings are, so far as my experience goes, men who are sensitive to blame rather than men who are sensitive to praise. They are self-torturers looking for darts that will wound them. A hundred columns of praise will not make them happy, but a single paragraph of censure will keep them awake all night as on a bed of thistles. Many great men have had this extraordinary sensitiveness to criticism. Tennyson, it is said, could be made miserable even by an anonymous attack on his work in a paper of which he had never heard. There can be little happiness in celebrity for a celebrity with such a temperament as this. I doubt, indeed, if any celebrity can be really happy who does not follow the advice of Mr. Shaw, who once said—or is said to have said: ‘Don’t mind what they say, so long as they say it.’

Even Mr. Shaw, who has accepted both the roses and the thistles of celebrity more philosophically than most men of genius, seems to find celebrity more burdensome now than he found it when it was confined to a small circle of Socialists and serious-minded playgoers. To-day there is scarcely a hotel in the whole world to which he can go—not, at least, a good hotel—without being stared at and even talked to, not as a human being, but as a celebrity. If he goes down into the country—so he told

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a *Daily Mail* interviewer—he has to hide in a corner of the garden in order to be ‘nowhere near the infernal telephone’. ‘Do you know,’ he said to the interviewer, ‘all yesterday the newspapers were ringing me up to ask what I thought of Menjou, and what Menjou thought of me. In the end I got so angry that I hurled insults at them through the telephone, but they didn’t seem to mind.’ To the uncelebrated it may seem a delightful fate to be rung up at all hours of the day and be asked all sorts of questions, from whether women ought to attend flower-shows to what one would do if one had to spend Whit Monday at Brighton, and probably most of us would be highly flattered on the first occasion on which the *Sunday Picturegram* rang us up to invite us to express our opinion on some such subject. But we have only to remember what a nuisance the telephone is even at present in order to realize what a torture it would be if we became celebrated. Might we not even reach a point at which we longed to live incognito again and return to the equality of the nursery?

There are, on the other hand, practical advantages in being celebrated. If Mr. Adolphe Menjou has enjoyed the orgy of celebrity with which he has been greeted during his recent visit to London, he has, we may be sure, had excellent reasons for this quite apart from the ordinary man’s love of applause. He need not

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be a vain man in order to appreciate the value of publicity. Every business man knows the importance of publicity, and the artist who is a good business man knows that nothing succeeds like celebrity. Even if Mr. Menjou were a shy man—which he is probably not—he would be wise in his own interests patiently to endure the day-long bombardment of camera and fountain-pen. What business man is there who could refuse so noble an advertisement for his wares ?

As for the public, who create the celebrity of celebrated men, many people regard them as a parcel of fools, and perhaps the world has gone a little far in recent years in making celebrated men so much more celebrated than any man ought to be. At the same time, it is intolerable to live in a world without celebrities, even if it is only in a village. The village as well as the nation must have its Hampden—a villager with a personality just a little more remarkable than that of any of the other villagers. We look round in life for these eminent personalities, as we do in fiction, and we celebrate them wherever they appear. We are so much in love with greatness that almost any kind of greatness will satisfy us. There is an undoubted pleasure in being invited to dine, for example, with any human being who has achieved even temporary eminence, whether as a divine or as a dancer, as a statesman or as a tennis-player, as a judge or as a clown. We

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are naturally curious about men who stand a little above their fellows, as we are more curious about the prize-winners at a cattle-show than about the animals that have won no prizes. Rank is a prize-label that has always given human beings this desirable quality of eminence, and men of genius themselves have been known to be elated in the presence of kings, not because they were good kings, but merely because they were kings. Did not Sir Walter Scott beg for the wine-glass of King George IV, and store it piously in his pocket, after which he negligently sat down on it? Critics have accused Scott of flunkeyism, in this, but was he guilty of anything worse than an innocent belief in greatness? Thomas Moore showed as innocent belief in greatness when he walked Byron along the street outside his father's shop in Dublin in order that his parents might see him in the company of a peer. All our eager interest in celebrities is the outcome of the same simple faith. Even to have seen one of them in the flesh remains a memory for ever. We are asked by the cold-blooded why we are not content to see Mr. Menjou on the films, and why we should count it as still a more precious thing to see him passing in the street. There is no arguing about such matters. What we know is that we like to get as near our celebrities as possible, and that if we had seen Sir Henry Irving buying a box of matches from

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a pedlar in the Strand, it would have given us a treasured personal association with him till our dying day. How heart-breaking it would be to have lived in the same world with Mr. Shaw and Mr. Max Beerbohm and never to have set eyes on them ! And, no doubt, our love of seeing photographs of celebrated men and women in the newspapers is an extension of this passion for some kind of personal association with greatness. As for the celebrities themselves, do they, too, feel this thrill of pleasure in seeing another celebrity passing in the street ? I doubt if it is possible. Celebrities meet as equals, and the finest pleasure of seeing a celebrity must always be like that of a child looking at a distant—an ever so distant—star.

XX. Names ~ ~ ~ ~

A COMPETITION has been held to decide which are the ten most popular names for girls, and, as the result of a poll of 628,000 votes, a winning list has been published that will astonish most people who did not take part in the competition. Here in order are the ten girls' names that, it seems, are at present most popular in these islands—Phyllis, Grace, Elsie, Barbara, Patience, Prudence, Jane, Susan, Priscilla and Matilda. If I disagree with the list, it is not that I am prepared to give offhand a counter-list of ten names that I should be certain I like better. It is not easy to know how much one likes any name apart from its associations. I might begin such a list with Mary, Ann and Elizabeth—three names that, apparently, the popular voice has rejected—but I do know how far my preference may be due to the beauty of the names, how far to association, or how far to the fact that they are among the least pretentious names it is possible to give to women. It is strange that the name of the mother of Jesus should seem the most modest of names to confer on a daughter, but so it is. Call a girl Sophonisba, and it seems infinitely more boastful.

Parents are, perhaps, to be sympathized with

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in their desire to give their infants names that will make a show in the world. They naturally wish their children to be conspicuous, and to start them on their career at the font. To call a child Mary is to hide her among a crowd of Marys. To call a child Guinevere is, in comparison, to make her a queen from the cradle. Or so it might be fancied. In practice things work out differently. Mary, in spite of the multitude of Marys, is still a name that shines like the brightest star in the heavens. It is the most conspicuous name in literature and history. It is one of the comparatively few women's names that are never incongruous in poetry. Burns would not have found it easy to address a poem 'To Matilda in Heaven'. The old ballad-maker would have made a fatal alteration if he had written :

Last night the Queen had four Elsie,
To-night she'll hae but three.

You may take name after name like this, and experiment with them in a setting of great poetry, and you will find that one after another will prove to be without that special charm either of association or of music that adds beauty even to a beautiful lyric. Coleridge failed with Genevieve ; Shelley only just succeeded with Emily. Other poets got over the difficulty, when writing impassioned verse to a

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woman with some such name as Georgina, by calling her by a Greek pseudonym such as Ianthe or Chloris. But even a pseudonym of this kind sometimes produces a ludicrous effect, as when Matthew Arnold, in his poem on the nightingale, suddenly says :

‘ Listen, Eugenia.’

I fancy, if Arnold had written : ‘ Listen, Ianthe,’ we should not have the same sense of incongruity. Hence, it does seem likely that some names are beautiful in themselves, and have the power to charm us in almost any setting. It is all the more puzzling that, while ‘ Mary ’ is beautiful and ‘ Ann ’ is beautiful separately, the two names in combination should seem positively comic. Is the combination grotesque in itself, or is our attitude to it merely the result of a long series of Victorian jokes about servant girls ? Marian, in one word, is a beautiful name ; why not Mary Ann in two ? It may be that there are no names that are ugly in themselves, but that we learn to dislike certain names on account of their associations with low comedy. Or it may be that a double name offends our sense of the fitness of things. We do not mind two names in a signature, but they seem to us excessive if used constantly. When I was a boy, there were still a great many little boys in the country parts of Ulster whose

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parents always addressed them as 'Robert George', 'William John' and 'Samuel James'. Each name seemed to be made ridiculous by its collocation with the other, just as a man would be ridiculous if he went about wearing two hats. There is no objection to a man's possessing two hats, but he should not wear them at the same time.

It is doubtful, indeed, if there is not always a disadvantage in a multiplicity of names. Kings are commonly baptized with more names than even they themselves can possibly remember, but as a rule only one of the long catalogue is used, and a king—like a commoner—is content to be known by a single Christian name such as Edward or George. These royal names are for the most part simple and popular. There has been no King Algernon in England. Algernon, for some unaccountable reason, is a name that would seem a little pretentious even in a king. It used to seem to many people absurd in a poet, and it would be possible to argue, if not to prove, that the premature failure of Swinburne's inspiration was due to the fact that this Christian name was too much for his genius. Certainly, most of the English poets have had names from association with which the Muses would not shrink. From Geoffrey Chaucer to Alfred Tennyson, most of them seem to have carried within their names a destiny of poetry. John Keats is the eminent

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exception, though I am not sure that even his name would appear quite so ugly if 'Keats' were pronounced so as to rhyme with 'greats', as it may once have been. Shelley, it is true, though he had a beautiful surname suffered from a name that was not beautiful all through. Speak of him as Shelley and you seem to have the essence of his poetry; speak of him as 'Percy Bysshe Shelley' and you have at once the incongruities of his life in a few syllables. How beautiful in comparison is the name of Mary Shelley! How modest and how musical! Perhaps it is partly because of her name that some of us can hardly bear to hear her criticized. A clever young writer was recently sneering at her because she did not like Shelley to dress in such a peculiar way that people stared at them when they were out walking. But how could a woman with so beautiful a name be expected to sympathize with eccentricities of dress? It is easy to forgive Shelley a hundred years after his death, but we who forgive him have not to appear in public with him, feeling responsible, as a wife did, for his being properly clothed. On this point Mary Shelley was wiser than Percy Bysshe Shelley, and the grace of her wisdom is in her name. He had only an inspired surname, while she had a name that was inspired from the first letter to the last. How well she knew that his genius lay in his surname is clear from that legend of the meeting on the

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stairs of her father's house, when he breathed the name 'Mary!' and she replied 'Shelley!' Substitute 'Percy!' for 'Shelley!' and the world loses one of its beautiful stories.

Mr. George Moore some years ago worked out a theory of the appropriateness of the names of men of genius. Surely, the parents of Oliver Goldsmith were unconscious prophets when they gave him so admirable a name. It is as though *The Vicar of Wakefield* had already been begun on the day of his baptism. There have, it is true, been men of genius who have been given names unworthy of them by their parents, but, as often as not they have in later life taken names that seem to fit them perfectly. Three of the most famous writers in Europe in modern times—Anatole France, Gabriele d'Annunzio and Joseph Conrad—have signed works of genius with names of genius, but the names were not given to them in the presence of godfathers. Again and again we find the man of genius striving for perfection in his name as in his writing. How great a difference Robert Louis Stevenson made by changing the spelling of his second name 'Lewis'! Whether parents can endow a child with genius merely by giving him a perfect name is a matter on which there may be two opinions. But it would be interesting to inquire whether there has been more than one Rudyard Kipling even in name. There is, it is true, a second Bernard

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Shaw ; he is an undertaker a little to the south of Blackfriars Bridge. There was even a second H. G. Wells who appeared, I believe, in municipal politics a few years ago. But you might go through England, I fancy, without finding a second Walter de la Mare.

It is also a significant fact that there has never been a man of genius called Ebenezer Fudge or by any of the numerous names comparable to it. Read the names over the small shops as you walk through the streets, and you will constantly see a name that you know could not possibly belong to a poet. Or go through the telephone directory and you will find names like Abraham Snyders, which you realize at once could never be affixed to a great sonnet. And we have much the same feeling in regard to the names of beautiful women. If you fell in love with a beautiful unknown woman, you would be horrified to learn that she had not a name in conformity with her features. You would be like Nicholas Nickleby when he sent Newman Noggs to make inquiries about the lovely lady with whom he had fallen in love. When Newman returned, Nicholas besought him eagerly : ' The name, the name, my dear fellow ! ' ' The name's Bobster,' said Newman. ' Bobster,' cried Nicholas, incredulous with disgust. ' That's the name,' said Newman : ' I remember it by Lobster.' Nicholas argued that this must be the servant's name, but Newman stuck to it

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that the lady herself was called Bobster—Miss Cecilia Bobster. ‘Cecilia, eh?’ Nicholas consoled himself. ‘Well, Cecilia is a pretty name.’ There have, undoubtedly, been pretty women with ugly names, and most men will swallow the name rather than lose the woman. But not without making a face about it. Keats, despite the defect of his own name, must surely have been miserable at first to find himself losing his heart to a girl called Fanny Brawne. It would be well, I think, if beautiful women would begin, like men of genius, to discard unsuitable names and to adopt better ones—to be as careful, indeed, of their names as of their complexions. All women would then be appropriately named as the women in Shakespeare, and no young lover would any longer need to break his heart on learning that he was enamoured of a Bobster.

XXI. The Curse



DEAN INGE has been raising again the old question whether work is a blessing or a curse. Like tobacco and a good many other things, it is probably both. Carlyle said of tobacco that he was miserable with it and that he was miserable without it, and that he would rather be miserable with it. Could the general attitude to work be better expressed ? We do not, as we sit down to our work in the morning, say to ourselves : ‘ Oh, the joy of work ! Oh, the joy of honest endeavour ! How happy the prospect of a long day’s toil ! ’ We take no more pleasure in beginning our daily labour, indeed, than a horse in being yoked to a cart. The horse is submissive, and so are we, but there are mornings, on which, if rebellion were possible, we should rebel. On the other hand, it is doubtful if we should be happier if we suddenly found ourselves unemployed. Most of us, I agree, desire employment chiefly in order that we may earn enough money to pay our bills and amuse ourselves and, if possible, our friends ; but it is conceivable, that a wise man would also desire employment for its own sake, and that, if he were given the choice before birth between an active and an idle life, he would choose an active life as the less tedious of the

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two. There is at least this to be said for regular employment, that it solves the problem of what to do with the greater part of our time. The ordinary human being is born without the slightest notion of what to do with his time, if he is left in a position to settle the question for himself. If he were a gnat, he would dance up and down in the air with his fellow-gnats from morning till night. If he were a swift, he would rush screaming above houses and gardens with his fellow-swifts till the fall of darkness. If he were a cat, he would never tire of eating, sleeping, jumping over garden-fences, and hiding under rhododendrons in the hope that a bird would alight within his reach on the lawn. No animal except man—apart from animals in captivity—has ever been known to suffer from boredom. The thrush does not yawn in the ash-tree while it is yet afternoon, and no wasp ever complained that life is dull. It is, perhaps, presumptuous in a human being to dogmatize about the feelings of thrushes and wasps, but let him disprove my assertion who can.

There are few animals, indeed, sufficiently unoccupied to have time to be bored. None of them inherit fortunes that put them beyond the possibility of starving if they do not work. Even the cow in the field has to spend an enormous proportion of her time in ripping her food from the ground and in chewing her cud. The owl toils as laboriously as a fisherman in

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pursuit of food. I cannot, I confess, read the mind of a drone, and it may be that he is as subject to tedium as a human being; but we may take it as established that the curse of Adam was pronounced against most of the animals before it was pronounced against Adam, and that they live all the more interesting lives as a result of the curse. The chief pleasure of life is in being alive, and a bird, like a man, is never so much alive as when most active. It is true that the bird has only one scheme of activity. Every willow-wren is active in much the same way in which every other willow-wren is active. Special problems may arise for it owing to the weather or other circumstances, but, if it were asked to describe its ideal day, every willow-wren in England would probably give exactly the same answer, praising the same morning habits, the same kind of house, the same kind of food, the same kind of song. If a willow-wren were left a fortune, it would, I am convinced, behave exactly like a willow-wren that was the victim of economic necessity. It can conceive no other kind of activity or happiness. This is true of nearly every animal that has not become a parasite of man.

Man, fortunately or unfortunately, is an animal who learned early to differentiate between life and work. He learned how to produce more than he could eat, and how to

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compel others to produce things for him to eat. His chief work as he rose in the world, was to make others work for him, and he bequeathed wealth to his children that placed them above the necessity of work. The wise among his children insisted none the less upon working—throwing themselves into politics, war, sport or the arts. But they did not always regard this as work. They were of the opinion that work is something that one is paid to do and that it ceases to be work if one is not paid for it. Thus, if a rich man plays tennis, he hardly thinks of himself as working, though most people would regard a professional tennis-player as a worker. Similarly, few of us feel that we are working when we read a play of Shakespeare, yet we should all describe as a worker the critic who read a play of Shakespeare for the purpose of reviewing a new edition of it. We give the name of work only to about half our activities, and confine it chiefly to those activities which have a solemn purpose, such as earning a living or serving our fellow-creatures. We call 'work' almost anything that is done for money, except stealing and murder; we regard the bookmaker as a worker no less than the clergyman, and we should no more think of accusing a professional footballer than a cotton operative of idleness. Beyond this, however, we allow the name of work to the activities of many people who make no money

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by them. There are rich statesmen, who are out of pocket as a result of their political activities, but they seem none the less industrious to us on that account, and we speak of Shelley's poems as his 'works', though he never made enough out of them to pay the seed-bill of a canary. We should never dream, on the other hand, of describing fox-hunting as work, though it is probably quite as hard work as driving a tram-car. But it has no other object than the fox-hunter's amusement, and so we count the man an idler.

We should be more reasonable if we gave the name of work to all the activities of a human being. If we did, it would be considerably easier to decide the question whether work was a blessing or a curse. The contrast would then be clear between idleness and activity, and an overwhelming majority of men would at once vote against a life of complete idleness. Much as we may resent compulsory activity, we know that it is the activity of our faculties—whether in our faculty of walking or of hitting a ball, of observation or imagination—that the chief source of our happiness lies. The completely idle man—idle, I mean, in body, mind and soul—would be as miserable as a bird confined all day and every day to one branch or as a gnat forbidden to dance. We try to escape from compulsory work, but it is only to fly to voluntary work. If, freed from the one, we cannot

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discover the other, we do not taste happiness. That is why it is not mere cant to say it is possible for a rich man, with no other cause for being unhappy except idleness, to be unhappier than an underpaid miner.

As for the comparative excellences of compulsory work and voluntary work, I have no doubt that a life of voluntary work is the happier lot for a man who possesses a strong will and can subject himself to a purpose. But the ordinary man has only a moderately strong will and conflicting purposes. For him—that is, for me—compulsion has its charms. It does for us what our wills cannot do. It starts for us the engine that we might not ourselves otherwise have the strength of will to start, and makes it certain that we shall not lack occupation till evening. No doubt, a great deal depends on the kind of work we are compelled to do, and I should look blue enough if necessity dragged me from my bed in order that I might perform the duties of a railway-porter or a dustman. Even so, however, it seems to me probable that, when human beings are unhappy, this is usually the result, not of the kind of work they are compelled to do, but the amount of wages they are compelled to accept. There is scarcely any kind of work that human beings cannot enjoy doing if they are well enough paid for it. Even if work is not particularly pleasant, there is pleasure to be got from doing it well. It is the

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artist in man that enables him to enjoy whatever work he engages in, whether painting or cookery, whether gardening or cleaning windows. Unfortunately, there is no compulsion on us to be artists, and it is difficult to persuade ourselves that we can enjoy doing what we should never dream of doing voluntarily, if only we do it perfectly. Yet, if we reflect for a moment, we realize that the men who resent most bitterly the necessity of working are those who have never discovered the pleasure of working hard. I speak as one who has no consuming passion for work, and who, if he could afford it, would probably be idle on at least five days in the seven. Possibly, now that I have compulsorily contracted the habit of work, I should still occasionally do a little, even if I were left a fortune, but it would be very little. Nothing short of compulsion could have turned me into the slave that I am, but, being a slave, I can at least idealize my servitude and tell myself that I am fortunate in not having been born free. In any case, having to work, we might as well try to enjoy it, and the only way to enjoy work is to do it as if we enjoyed it.

XXII. Frauds ∞ ∞ ∞ ∞

FEW things have been more frequently commented on since the birth of journalism than the general preference of a story about a bad man or woman to a story about a good one. We may dispute this as we please and pretend that the editors of newspapers are foisting narratives of crime on millions of readers who would prefer narratives of virtuous deeds ; but we have only to consider what news it is that we ourselves read with the greatest interest in order to realize that editors have made no mistake about the tastes of their readers. A man here and a woman there may leave the report of a murder trial unread and turn eagerly instead to an account of the proceedings of the League of Nations, but such readers are the advance guard of a better age, born before their time. This is not to say that the League of Nations is a dull subject. There is probably no such thing as a dull subject. There is no denying, however, that it is easier to be dull about the League of Nations than about murder ; and, since human beings usually follow the line of least resistance, both as readers and writers we naturally choose those subjects on which it is easiest to be interesting. That is why most of us avoid philosophy, high

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finance, and palaeography—all of them fascinating subjects, but subjects that require both knowledge and wit beyond our scope to make them enduring. On the subject of crime, however, every man is a ready authority, and he need be no master of the inner secrets of literature in order to make other people as much interested in it as himself.

Evidently, the publishers agree with the editors of newspapers in regarding evil as much more attractive bait for the general public than good. There is seldom a week passes without the appearance of two or three volumes containing a collection of stories about poisoners, cut-throats, forgers, jewel-thieves, and women who preyed like harpies on the weaker sex. *A Book of Famous Scoundrels* is followed by *Potions and Passions*, and this in turn by *Criminals Fair and Frail*. *Murders and Mysteries* comes along a week later in company with *Some Lively Bigamists* and *Queens of the Underworld*. Not even the revived interest in religion seems to tempt publishers to offer their readers books of a comparable kind containing the biographies of those who have lived in obedience to the Ten Commandments. *Twelve Kind Fathers* may exist in manuscript somewhere, but I do not think it can be found at the booksellers'; and it is doubtful if *A Book of Presbyterian Saints* would be read by anybody except a few Presbyterians, and even they would

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secretly prefer a book about Eugene Aram or Charles Peace. This, of course, may be a mark merely of a passing taste. It is possible that we are living in an age in which, if both Plutarch and Suetonius were writing, Suetonius would be the more popular. Certainly, in the Victorian Age, the criminal had not outstripped the virtuous man in the race for popularity by the distance by which he has outstripped him in later years. Biography was then regarded largely as a kind of literature that held up an example to the ordinary human being. It may seem incredible, but even forty years ago a missionary was as popular as a murderer. J. G. Paton, Mackay of Uganda, and other missionaries were heroes whose adventures seemed as exciting as anything you could find in a detective story. It would be absurd to suggest that the heroic kind of biography has entirely disappeared, but it does not hold the same place in popular esteem that it held in the nineteenth century. The pendulum, no doubt, will swing in time and our grandchildren will re-discover the joy of being edified. But, for better or for worse, rogues are in the ascendant to-day.

The truth is, I imagine, that, however the pendulum swings, neither the rogue nor the good man will ever cease to be interesting as a figure in a story. The life of each of them has the interest of adventure. If the rogue is more

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popular than the good man in the newspapers, it is largely because his exposure makes it possible to tell the full adventurous story of his career. Good deeds and bad deeds alike are done by stealth, but there are no detectives to bring good deeds to light and to expose good men to the glare of publicity. A good man's life is usually a secret that cannot be published till he is dead ; the bad man's secret may any day be surprised by Scotland Yard. We may know that a man is good, but we do not see his life as a dramatic struggle. When we consider how difficult it is to be virtuous, we realize that there must be as much drama and struggle in the lives of thousands of virtuous men and women as in the lives of criminals, and that the Recording Angel will have as exciting narratives to relate about saints as about scoundrels. But, meanwhile, it is not possible without knowing either of them personally to get to know as much about a good man as about a bad man while they are both alive. And the result is that while it is possible to print twenty good columns in the Press about a living criminal, a philanthropist seldom gets even a column till he is dead.

The chief pleasure of reading about crime is probably, however, the pleasure of the chase. There is something at once exciting and alarming in the spectacle of a human being as he is tracked down by justice. Even when our

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sympathies are divided, as they are when we read about Eugene Aram, for instance, it is probable that we obtain an awful pleasure as the unhappy hare is at last overtaken by the hounds of the law. If we were above such an emotion we should scarcely read stories about crime. Many writers of detective stories try to temper our cruelty with mercy by allowing the criminal at the last moment to cheat the gallows by making away with himself in some impossible fashion. But even so we have deliberately taken part in a chase and enjoyed it. We may defend ourselves on the ground that we have rejoiced in the triumph of justice—and certainly no one could enjoy reading detective stories in which the hero and heroine had always at the end of their struggles to commit suicide and murderers were left chuckling over their dead bodies—but it seems to me that in stories of crime we take a mainly sensational pleasure in watching a complicated chase of good and evil along the edge of a precipice, with evil sure to topple over the edge in the end.

There are some kinds of criminals, however, in the story of whose lives the excitement of the chase will not account for our interest. The fraud and impostor is often interesting in himself apart from the story of the way in which he was tracked down and captured. Here our interest is chiefly the interest of

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amazement—of amazement at the man's brazen adventurousness and at the ease with which he found dupes in a simple world. The career of such a man as Arthur Casson, who was sentenced to four years' penal servitude for obtaining money by false pretences 'in connexion with Thurston Hall Convalescent Homes', stirs our sense of wonder. According to himself, he is the son of a great philanthropist. 'He did a lot of good,' he told the jury of his father, 'and he was a father to be proud of.' Proud or not, the son appears himself to have been something less than a philanthropist in the promotion of his companies. He ran a London weekly in 1921, and the investors in his weekly lost their money. In 1923 he traded in the name of the Devon and Cornwall Paint Co., Ltd., and again the investors lost their money. The Casson Chemical Company and Alaska Remedies were no more successful, and in 1924 the North Africa Trading Co., Ltd., which seems never to have traded, again cost the public such money as they invested in it. In 1926 D. Casson's Agency, Ltd., Paris, the Sphere House and Estate Agency, and the British Courier Service, Paris, seem to have been equally unfortunate for the investor. In that year Casson went to San Remo as the Count de Casson and set up the English Household Stores, besides running a weekly which published a criticism of the British Consul that led to his

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enforced return to Great Britain. Moving to Edinburgh, he edited a paper called the *Scottish Drysalter*, and about the same time founded a quack-medicine company. When the police began to show an interest in this he told them irrelevantly that he had entertained royalty and had been offered a baronetcy by Mr. Lloyd George. He has also passed as the Baron de Casson and as Athos de Casson—a member of an old Huguenot family—and appears never to have had the slightest difficulty in finding new dupes and victims, male and female, for his various enterprises in pursuit of money and pleasure.

I suppose, when we read the story of such a career, we go on reading largely through love of being astonished. This monocled man of fifty-nine, with the ingratiating smile that was 'his great stock-in-trade', who a few years ago was driving about London 'in a large motor-car with a uniformed footman', is one of those amazing creatures in whose existence we scarcely believe till they appear in the dock. In spite of the records of the varieties of human nature, we never cease to be surprised when we learn that either an unusually good man or an unusually bad man is alive. It is as though we had heard of the discovery of a unicorn on the Devonshire moors. A fabulous monster has appeared in this unfabulous world and we are all eyes for his story. We condemn frauds

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and impostors, but even so they possibly exercise a spell over us as they do over their other victims. They cannot persuade us that they are innocent, as apparently in nine cases out of ten they can persuade themselves, but they fascinate us in a curious way like Reynard the Fox. Rogues of this kind, if we can forget the sufferings of their victims—and the human mind is so constituted that we can easily do that, for a time at least—may even be good company. The bogus company promoter who can dwindle out of view as editor of the *Scottish Drysalter* is so far a comic figure, and his tribute to his father in court as ‘ a father to be proud of ’ stamps him ironically as a character. Who, then, could grudge the space devoted by the Press to the story of his career? Rural deans may be living better lives, but they are not living lives that are better to read about at breakfast.

XXIII. The Mumbler

MANY people who mumble must have drawn solace from Mr. Bernard Shaw's recent confession that, in the privacy of his home, he is often accused of mumbling. Mr. Shaw, as everybody who has heard him speak knows, is a man who pronounces every word as distinctly as if he thought distinct pronunciation were the purpose of his existence on earth. None of the older comedians who used to bring out every tiniest point in the Gilbert and Sullivan operas spoke more clearly than Mr. Shaw. It would be impossible to invent a machine that could speak more clearly. Yet we find this master of the audible vocable confessing that at the breakfast-table he takes so little pains with his speech that very often his wife, instead of giving him the answer he expects, says, 'Don't mumble, and don't turn your head away when you speak. I can't hear a word you are saying.' If he has occasion to ask his wife to tell him the time, he declares, he does not say, 'What o'clock is it?' as he would to a stranger, but 'clock 's 't?'

It is pleasant to find that a great man shares our failings, even in a small measure, and we who belong to the mumbling school of conversationalists shall feel less ashamed in future,

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as we are asked to repeat our remarks, when we remember that Mr. Shaw, too, mumbles. Not that he mumbles as we mumble. For we mumble, not only in the home, but in the 'bus, in the restaurant, in the office, in the shop, at dinner-parties and at every kind of social gathering. Scarcely anyone ever hears anything we say till we have said it twice, and, when we have said it twice, it is usually something different from what we said at first. I have several friends, indeed who, I am sure, have never heard with absolute correctness a single sentence I have uttered. There is one charming woman in particular whom I constantly meet at crowded parties. Whenever I see her I always cross the room to her, and we have long conversations in which, though each of us shouts in order to be heard amid the ear-splitting din, neither of us can understand a word of the other's talk, for she, too, mumbles. Long ago I have given up the attempt to catch what she is saying, and while we are talking, I devote my ears to listening to the other conversations that are going on around us. I can see that she is doing the same thing, skilfully though she pretends to be interested in my inaudible words. In the result, I think, we both like talking to each other, since it is usually as enjoyable to listen to the conversation of people with whom one is not conversing as to listen to the conversation of the person with

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whom one is, or is supposed to be, conversing. Who does not like to overhear the conversation even of people who would bore one if they were talking to one ?

It might be suggested that the lady and I ought to say to each other frankly : ' Let's give up the pretence of talking. Let us simply stand opposite each other and listen to the interesting things that are being said by people with more audible voices than ours.' If I said this to her however, she would not hear what I was saying, and, if she said it to me, I should be as helpless. One of us might, of course, write to the other about it, but I fancy each of us would shrink from hurting the other's feelings by suggesting that she or he does not speak audibly. Besides, it is curiously unnerving to be in the company of another human being at a party if neither utters a sound. There is one lady to whom I have been introduced again and again in crowded rooms and who, as soon as the introduction is over, seems as if turned to stone. I say something to her for the sake of saying something. She stands, with her beautiful but impassive brow, gazing into vacancy, making no sound, giving not the least sign that she knows that I have spoken. Thinking, not so much that she has not heard me as that she does not even realize that I have said something that she could not hear, I raise my voice so that, even if amid the clamour she

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may not know that I am talking, she will know that I am making some kind of shouting noise. Not a movement of her lips or of any muscle of her face responds : she is still marble. Beads of self-consciousness begin to break out on my forehead : I feel, when I speak, that I am gibbering like a ghost foretelling the death of Caesar. First, I try to say something : then, while I am saying it, I decide not to say it : then, having ceased to say it, I begin saying it again, my throat parched, my brain reeling, my reason on the verge of collapse. Ultimately I, too, relapse into an agony of silence and stand throwing frightened glances round the room, till a merciful hostess comes up and rescues us from the horror of each other's company.

Assuredly, it is better to mumble in the company of another human being who is mumbling than to be silent in the company of another human being who is silent. When one has grown middle-aged, one can endure being silent at a party if one is allowed to stand in solitude against a wall and watch people. But I would rather sit or stand with St. Lawrence on his gridiron than sit or stand with another human being at a party without either of us being able to frame one even inaudible sentence. Hence the charming lady with the inaudible voice and I will, I hope, go on mumbling to each other when we meet in crowded rooms. She will say something to me which I shall catch as :

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‘Wa-wa-wa-wa-wa-wa.’ I shall reply in a sentence that she will hear as : ‘Woo-woo-woo ?’ She will smile graciously and reply in a confidential burst of anapests that will sound like : ‘Way-way-way, way-way-way, way-way-way, way-way-way, way-way-way, way-way-way, way-way-way, way-way-way, way.’ Delighted to find the conversation flowing so smoothly I shall return smile for smile and she will hear me murmuring : ‘A, e, i, o, u.’ She will look surprised and, if one may judge by the intonation of her voice, will answer with a question : ‘U, o, i, e, a ?’ Then, having discovered the virtues of the five vowels, we shall go on repeating them in all possible permutations and combinations, engaged in a cheerful juggler’s game of keeping all five in motion till a cruel host or hostess comes and tears us apart. I cannot be sure, of course, whether the lady enjoys talking to me as much as I enjoy talking to her, for she has never told me so, or, if she did, I did not hear what she said. I hope, however, that she imagines I am saying such amusing things as I imagine she is saying.

I am not sure, however, that it is merely my habit of mumbling that prevents other people from hearing me. It is possible that the fault is partly that of the inflection of my voice, which is different from the inflection of London. Excessive smoking, again, may have injured the resonance of my vocal chords. Still, I

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cannot claim to articulate like an elocution master. Whatever the cause may be, my friends hear only a small proportion of the things I say. It would sound modest if I said that possibly they do not miss very much. But it would be untrue. They miss a great deal. I have said many witty things and told many amusing stories in the voice they could not hear. Sometimes they say, 'I'm sorry, I didn't hear you,' and wait for me to repeat in an audible voice what I have been saying, but the witty thing that I repeat in an audible voice is never quite the same as the witty thing that was mumbled. It is no longer spiritual: it becomes mechanical as it is articulated clearly. It is the same with a story. I have often told an excellent story at the dinner-table, but have told it in a voice that makes it impossible to hear it. Then someone has asked me to repeat it. In such circumstances, one condenses, one becomes self-conscious, and somehow or other the point of the story vanishes. Luckily, very few people ask one to repeat what one has been saying. Most people would rather talk than listen, and are more inclined to the opinion that other people talk too much than that they talk too little. I should probably be of this opinion myself if I could make myself heard. Even as it is, indeed, I talk far more than my friends realize. If all the things I mumble in the course of a dinner-party were

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put into print, they would fill several columns of a newspaper. But no one attends to them. I was amused by an essay that one of the most delightful of my friends wrote on the subject of conversation—an essay in the course of which he praised this talker for his wit and that for his wisdom and went on to remark that, while good talkers are necessary for good conversation, scarcely less necessary are good listeners. And he singled me out as an example of a good listener, who took but a silent part in the conversation. It is a compliment that I would give much to deserve, but I do not like sailing under false colours, and the truth must be told. During all the many conversations I have had with my friend, I have listened, it is true, and listened with pleasure, but I have not been silent. I was talking hard most of the time—talking like a chattering schoolgirl—but, as I spoke in a low, mumbling voice, with very little movement of the lips, and he could not hear me, my friend did not know that I was talking, and concluded that I was one of the most silent men of his acquaintance.

Do I then, claim to be a brilliant conversationalist? No, but I claim to be one of the most accomplished mumblers of my generation.

XXIV. The Life of Fear

FEAR, according to a report issued by the National Council of Mental Hygiene, 'is a great factor in mental disorder. . . . It is the fear and not the conduct of life that is dangerous.' Contradict the first sentence, and you get a statement that is equally true: 'Fear is a great factor in mental sanity.' The man who is not afraid of the things of which he ought to be afraid is a good deal less than sane. It is wisdom to be afraid of drinking a bottle of strychnine at one draught, or of sitting with one's feet in a coal fire, or of lying down in a bath of boiling water. There are occasions on which it is the mark of a wise man to fear neither poison nor fire, as we learn when we read of Socrates and the Christian martyrs, but in the ordinary affairs of life a wholesome dread of such things is a sign of sanity. We do our best to fill children with a terror of red berries that are poisonous, of monkshood, of mushrooms that are not mushrooms, of earth in a cut, of playing games with matches, of sliding on thin ice, of bathing on dangerous coasts, of sitting in wet clothes, of walking across a field with a bull in it, of crossing the road without taking care of the traffic, of a hundred things that, if treated with indifference,

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may cost them their lives. We are frightened ourselves for the children's sake, and we do all in our power to infect them with our fears. We should consider parents who allowed a child to do whatever it pleased reckless to the point of imbecility. A father who found his three-year-old son playing with a razor would attempt to infect the child with his own panic. Every month that a child lives we do our utmost to implant in it a new kind of cowardice. And, till it is grown up, we add as many other cowardices as we dare. When we think of others we are always apt to over-emphasize the perils of life. It is difficult for many grown-up people not to conceive the life of the young as a childish totter along the edge of an incredibly dangerous precipice.

The human race, I suppose, has always grown up surrounded by a thousand terrors, real or imaginary, and I doubt if under any system of education it can ever be otherwise. We may diminish the number of the terrors, and educate children in boldness as well as in fear, but fear will always be part of wisdom. How far these fears cast a shadow over human lives it is impossible to estimate. It is extraordinary how happy a life can be lived amid a multitude of fears, and, on the other hand, I have known men who feared death as little as they would fear drinking a glass of wine, who nevertheless took a gloomy and despairing view of life. Most

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of us find odd compensations for our fears. The ordinary man's nature is composed of a strange mixture of fear and courage, so that fear never permanently dominates him; and if he is afraid in one thing, he makes up for it by being courageous in another. It was said of Demosthenes that he was a coward in war, and that, on running into a bush after a battle, on one occasion, he besought it for mercy. I do not know whether the story is true, but even if it is, the fact remains that Demosthenes was one of the most courageous statesmen in history. Contradictions of this kind are common. A soldier might be afraid of sitting down as one of thirteen at a table, and yet within twenty-four hours might be marching coolly under fire. Some men are afraid of pain and yet have no fear of death. Other men would be more afraid of being laughed at by fools than of being burnt alive. Many otherwise brave men are afraid of infection during an epidemic of influenza. Nearly every man has his own particular fears, but as a rule he has sufficient courage to counterbalance them and to prevent them from poisoning his life in any serious measure.

And there is another thing that enables us to be reasonably happy among our fears. We learn to laugh at ourselves and to see ourselves when we have played the coward as absurd characters. As a child, I confess, I feared

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having a tooth pulled out, and, on the eve of going to the dentist, I had to keep telling myself that patriots and martyrs had endured worse agonies, and attempting to screw up my courage by their noble examples. My relations used to laugh at my exhibition of timidity. I remember a young cousin who, on one such occasion, was sitting at the opposite side of the fire, and who, as he noticed my haunted expression, took up the tongs out of the grate and played with them as though they were a forceps. 'Look, Y,' he said, with a malicious grin, opening them and putting them near my mouth; 'the dentist does like this.' He made as though he had caught my tooth in the tongs and were slowly twisting and dragging it out. 'It's as easy as anything,' he said. 'Now, it's out. No, it's the wrong tooth. Open your mouth again, and let's have a go at the right one'; and once more he approached my face with the monstrous forceps. He did it all with such derisive cheerfulness that I too, I suppose, began to take pleasure in deriding my cowardice, since I eventually joined in his laughter. Most of us who are cowards, no doubt, get some comparable and compensatory enjoyment from our cowardice. There is a moment, it is true, when we reach the peak of fear, and there is no laughter there, but as we approach the peak, and especially as, having passed it, we begin to escape down the other side, there is so much to

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laugh at that we are sometimes inclined to wonder whether anyone who has never been afraid has tasted the pleasures of life at their sweetest.

And yet, if I am honest with myself, I know that, were I a fairy godfather, I should hesitate to take the gift of fear to a god-child's cradle. I might take a little mild fear, and call it prudence. But I should take courage—courage that would remain unmoved though the heavens fell—as one of my three most precious gifts. I should say to the child as it grew up: 'Dare to be a Daniel and don't get your feet wet.' I should say: 'Model yourself on Savonarola and wrap yourself up well.' I should say: 'Live dangerously and mind the crossings.' That, I suppose, is what age has always said to youth, and what it will always say. Even the most cautious of parents have for generations held up as an example to children (whom they forbid to play hockey because it is too dangerous) an apostle who lived so dangerously that he was crucified upside down. It is as though we said: 'Safety first, and don't be afraid of death itself.' This is one of the eternal paradoxes, and, absurd though it seems, it is perfect common sense. If we elaborate it, we know that it means only that safety in itself is preferable to danger, but that there are occasions on which it is better to face danger than to skulk in safety. As philosophers we regard

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danger as a thing to be avoided rather than feared. We teach children to fear things only because that is the easiest way to teach them to avoid them. If we were wise and were made of the stuff of heroes, we should probably bring up children to avoid many things but be afraid of nothing, and, if we were sure that they would live well, we should rejoice to see them living dangerously. In other words, if we could bestow on a child the gift of wisdom, we should also bestow on it the gift of courage. But how can we be sure that a child is wise, and who would bestow the gift of courage on a fool? There is nothing to be done with a fool except to try to make him afraid. How much pleasanter revolutions would have been if only the fools had not been so heroic! If none but the wise were brave, we should long ago have arrived at an earthly Paradise.

Hence, when we try to teach the young to be afraid, our real object is to give them a working substitute for wisdom. Most of us are naturally pessimistic and have little confidence in human nature, believing with Carlyle that people are mostly fools. In offering the medicine of fear as a preventive of folly, however, we produce results that we do not intend. The human being is born into a vast inheritance of terrors, and, when we add to them a new stock of terrors, we may unwittingly be putting a greater burden on his imagination than he can

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bear. Most of us, I suppose, are born with a fear of the dark ; but in the past the parents of many children have doubled the fear by populating the darkness with devils. In ninety-nine children out of a hundred, a sufficiency of courage or humour even then is a safeguard against the oppression of too great a misery. There are, however, children who become a prey to such nervous terrors, like Charles Lamb who declared : ‘ I never laid my head on my pillow, I suppose, from the fourth to the seventh or eighth year of my life . . . without an assurance, which realized its own prophecy, of seeing some frightful spectre.’ Terrors of this kind are entirely different in their nature from cowardice. Many a coward has lived a long life without ever having suffered from these imaginative obsessions. I have known as many brave men as cowards to become haunted by meaningless fears. That is what makes one wonder whether the deliberate instillation of fear into the young is the real explanation of the worst kind of imaginative anguish. It was an accident that led Lamb to pore over the illustrated History of the Bible that played such tragic pranks with his imagination. And, if he had not discovered the History of the Bible, it is likely enough that he would have found the seeds of his fears elsewhere. Dr. Johnson’s haunting fear of death was different in kind. It was the fear of an over-sensitive conscience

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saturated in a belief in punishment after death. Yet, with Johnson as with Lamb, there is some reason for believing that a disordered nervous system was the cause rather than the result of the fear. A curious light is thrown on the whole problem by the fact that Johnson and Lamb, despite the torturing insanity of their fears, seem to us to-day two of the supremely sane figures in English literature—figures of a sanity that far surpasses that of most of the fearless men we know. We may explain this by the fact that, to balance their fears, they possessed courage and humour beyond what falls to the common lot. It looks as though it did not greatly matter that a man should experience the last extremity of fear, if he happens to be a hero and a humorist. He will suffer, but he will survive. He will survive, perhaps, even if he has only a sense of humour.

XXV. Chewing-Gum ♪ ♪ ♪

‘WHY in Heaven’s name,’ asks the Duchess of Sutherland in *The Times*, referring to the latest Scotland Yard regulation, ‘are our police forbidden to chew gum?’ It is a question that will awaken a sympathetic echo in many a generous bosom. The world has groaned under many tyrannies in the past. There was Pharaoh, there was Nero, and there was Oliver Cromwell; but under none of these rulers, despotic though they were, were policemen forbidden to chew gum when on duty. Even Mussolini, who takes a particular pleasure in forbidding people to do things, has never taken so extreme a step as this. It is particularly unfortunate that, at a time when England and America seemed to be drawing closer together, an edict should be issued which not only is an insult to the Statue of Liberty but casts a slur on a famous American institution. It may be retorted that, though chewing-gum may be an excellent thing for Americans, it does not necessarily follow that it is a good thing for Englishmen, and that the Americanization of England has already gone far enough without permitting policemen to stand in the London streets, moving their jaws like cattle in a field. On the other hand, it seems to me that if

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something must be done to stem the flood of Americanization the first attack should have been made on some less innocuous American import—say, cinema slang or cocktails. It has been well said that a human being is seldom more innocently employed than when he is chewing gum, and we should encourage the more innocent pleasures, whether they come from America or not.

What, then, is chewing-gum that Scotland Yard should frown on it so sternly?

Chewing-gum is, we are told, a resinous gum used as a masticatory or, if you prefer the definition in the Oxford Dictionary, 'the hardened secretion of the spruce-tree, or other insoluble substance, chewed, after the manner of tobacco, by boys and girls'. 'The habit of chewing gum,' says the American encyclopaedia, *The Americana*, 'is perhaps peculiar to the United States', but that was written when America was still a remote country exercising little influence on the manners and customs of Europeans. It was originally introduced into America, it is said, by Thomas Adams, who in his youth met a refugee Mexican general and by him was given a stick of some rubbery substance to chew, the general himself chewing as he conversed. Adams did not like the taste of the gum, but, being a man of inventive mind, went home, and made certain experiments in the hope of being able to use it in the manufacture

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of false teeth. It proved useless for dental purposes, and Adams in a moment of inspiration decided that it would be worth trying it as a sweetmeat. This was about sixty years ago, and it was not long till virgin forests began to disappear as a result of the growing appetite for the new confection. 'With the increase of the habit,' we are told, 'the spruce supply nearly failed, and recourse was had to other ingredients.' Chicle gum—an elastic gum produced by the bully-tree, naseberry, or sapodilla (*Achras sapota*), a native of South America—then took the place of the resinous exudations of the spruce, etc., in the manufacture of chewing-gum. 'The chicle gum,' says *The Americana*, 'is chopped up into fine particles, dried and then cooked in steam-jacketed bottles. At this stage sweetening and flavouring ingredients are added to the mass, which is mixed mechanically. The resulting "dough" is then kneaded on a table and rolled between rollers having knives set into their faces.' After this it is parcelled up in little packets marked 'Must not be swallowed' and sold to boys, girls and policemen. How much boys, girls and policemen appreciate it may be estimated from the fact that in the year 1925 alone the amount of gum chewed, or at least sold to be chewed, was valued at 47,838,000 dollars; and the spread of the custom of chewing has been so rapid in other countries that the value of the

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chewing-gum annually exported from the United States has increased from £40,000 in pre-war days to £400,000.

Since I began to write, facts have been brought to my notice which suggest that even in America the right to chew gum was not established without a struggle. It is only in recent years, I now learn, that chewing has been permitted in the American Navy, and this concession might never have been made had it not been for the Great War. The war opened men's eyes for the first time to the ethical importance of chewing-gum. It was during the war that one of the American papers published an article with the memorable heading, 'Chewing Gum Bolsters Courage While Shells Are Flying'. Members of the Air Force were especially enthusiastic in proclaiming the virtue of chewing-gum in soothing the nerves, and, as a result of this discovery, American sailors were not only permitted to chew gum while on duty but were given a free allowance of the sweetmeat. Naturally, other nations, eager to bring their armed forces to the highest point of efficiency, did not allow the innovation to pass unheeded. If one nation adopts a new weapon, other nations must necessarily follow suit. Hence one was not surprised to learn a little over a year ago that instructions had been issued to R.A.F. pilots, advising them to chew gum when flying at high altitudes. If it is

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established that chewing-gum can be of assistance to the most fearless men on earth, it is clear that derisive laughter at the mere mention of chewing-gum is misplaced and unintelligent. Chewing-gum may be said, indeed, to have earned its right to our respect as a result of the discovery of recent years. If Dr. Johnson had been living to-day—and especially if he had been living in America—he might have said, not ‘Brandy for heroes,’ but ‘Spearmint for heroes.’

For myself I can see no argument against the use of chewing-gum except that the killjoys do not like it. The killjoys hate to see the human jaws moving publicly in pleasure. They would, if they could, forbid eating anywhere but in the home. They would rather die than be seen eating a banana in the paddock at Ascot. I often wonder how people with this hatred of the spectacle of chewing can bear to be present at a dinner-party. If it is horrible to see people chewing gum in a ‘bus, it must surely be equally horrible to see people chewing salmon and chicken and strawberries at a dinner-table. Yet such is the antipathy of many people to the spectacle of chewing away from the table that a London magistrate some time ago, seeing a witness chewing something, said impatiently : ‘Come, young man, haven’t you finished breakfast, or are you an American ?’ Question after question was put to the witness,

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who merely nodded in reply to each as he continued to chew, till the magistrate demanded, 'How can you answer these questions with your mouth full?' At length, as he was unable to get any replies from the witness except nods and grimaces, he asked him: 'Do you chew for your health?'; in reply to which the witness again nodded assent. If the magistrate had delayed his bitter remarks till it was evident that the witness was speechless with chewing-gum, I should not have blamed him. But he began his attack on chewing-gum before he had given the man a chance to speak, and himself spoke as a killjoy who obviously disliked the movements of the human face in the happy act of masticating.

Whether it improves the human face to be constantly chewing is another question. There are authorities on beauty who say that it does not. An American lady has given it as her opinion that addiction to the habit of chewing gum has made the modern American girl's face as hard 'as the crockery of a railroad lunch counter'. 'Human beings,' she declared, 'were not meant to be ruminating animals, and when they try it there is some kind of a rebellion of nature, and the muscles of the jaw become unduly enlarged.' Surely, however, there existed hard-faced, large-jawed women long before the invention of chewing-gum. Jezebel lived some thousands of years before the

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ruminant age of Mr. Wrigley. As for its being against nature to chew, I am sure that nature meant us to chew more than most of us do. If Mr. Wrigley has become one of the ten richest millionaires in America, it is because humanity has instinctively recognized that he was helping to restore to it the lost art of chewing. Chewing is as natural as cigarette-smoking or the use of lipstick, and what could be more natural than they ? It is as natural as playing lawn-tennis or driving a motor-car or writing with a fountain-pen. Mr. Gladstone attributed his long life to determined chewing, and by chewing Mr. Fletcher preserved himself from an early grave so that at the age of sixty he was able to turn a back somersault. I cannot believe that a practice which has produced such results as these is going to impair the beauty of women's faces. I have been unable, indeed, to discover a single argument against the use of chewing-gum except that people do not like to see other people chewing chewing-gum. It is on the altar of that unreasonable dislike that the London policeman is being sacrificed.

XXVI. Pigeon-Shooting at Monte Carlo

‘SURELY,’ said I to myself as I looked out of my bedroom window at Monte Carlo, ‘this is the most beautiful place I have ever seen.’ I have said this about a good many places, but I was more than usually sincere when I said it about Monte Carlo.

There are mornings on which this red-roofed town of white houses, built on the side of a mountain slope that descends steeply into the sea, seems the perfect setting for idle pleasure. If there are faults in the town, you do not notice them on such a morning against the prodigal perfection of the sun, the sky and the sea. In the full spread of the sun, the sea is so enchantingly blue that if any man discovered flowers of such a colour in his garden he would believe that he had died in his sleep and had been transported by good angels to Paradise. If there were shell-fish at the bottom of the ocean from which so wonderful a blue could be extracted you would have millionaires offering——. But one must not exaggerate, even when writing about the Mediterranean.

It is a defect in Monte Carlo, however, that there are very few places in it from which you can see the Mediterranean in peace as you walk.

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If you set out with a friend for a walk along the coast-road you have to march in single file on a narrow ledge of footpath, continually harassed by the trams and motors and charabancs that hurry past with a hideous cacophony of warning. If you walk inland, the slope is so steep that the gentlest stroll is like climbing up flights of stairs.

The only place in Monte Carlo where you can walk up and down, free alike from the clangour of machine-maddened Jehus and from the exhausting strain of hill-climbing, is the terraced promenade that runs at the height of Brighton cliffs above the sea behind the landward-facing Casino. And, if you prefer sitting to walking, there are royal-blue chairs, as clean as the sunshine itself, from one of which the spectacle of the beauty and the folly of the earth will lie spread before you as in a dream.

Immediately below the promenade, on another ledge above the sea, is a half-moon of green lawn. How refreshing, how untroubled it looks above the blue water ! How idyllically charming !

Scarcely have you had time to drink in the loveliness of the scene and to congratulate yourself on your good fortune in seeing this perfect place in this perfect hour when there is the sound of a gun. Startled, you glance down and see a bird that has risen into the air falling on the grass, where it lies with its wings flapping

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helplessly till a brown-and-white dog trots over to it, seizes it by the neck, and carries it back to a pavilion that is hidden from sight.

You become aware that what is taking place on the lawn is the famous sport of pigeon-shooting that has been so much and so furiously talked about by visitors to Monte Carlo. I had myself thought that *The Times* and the late H. W. Massingham had between them persuaded the Prince of Monaco to put an end to this curious game several years ago, but I never realized quite what a curious game it was till now that I saw it with my own eyes.

This is how it is played. There are five little green boxes standing like an arc of a circle in the middle of the lawn with five little paths running out to them over the green like radii. You hear the click of machinery and one of the boxes collapses flat with the earth. In doing so, it releases an imprisoned pigeon. As the pigeon flutters up into the air, a shot—usually followed by another—is fired, and, if the pigeon is lucky, it is killed outright.

The bird, however, is not always—or, so far as I could see on one afternoon, nearly always—killed outright. Immediately it falls, the dog canters out to retrieve it. On this particular afternoon, I saw more than one dying and terrified pigeon beating its way across the grass from the dog's mouth with wings that could no longer fly. It was odd to hear a woman on the

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promenade laughing as the dog failed to capture a bird till after two or three attempts.

While the dog is engaged on his errands of retrieval an attendant runs at top speed to the traps with a new bird in his hand, imprisons it in one of the green boxes and runs back as fast as he can to the pavilion again.

He has no sooner got back than another of the five boxes collapses with a rattle. Another bird flies up and, though hit, is not killed outright. It struggles a little way through the air, and in the end falls, dead or wounded, outside the railings of the lawn on to the rocks or into the sea, where there is no merciful dog to follow it.

Sometimes, when the box-trap collapses, the pigeon is so bewildered that it makes no attempt to fly, but remains standing and looking about it on the top of the trap. When this happens, balls are bowled at the pigeon over the lawn to scare it into flight. I saw four balls being bowled at one bird in an unsuccessful attempt to persuade it to rise and be shot at. It avoided the balls, but refused to leave the ground. In the end so spiritless a bird was considered not to be worth a sportsman's ammunition and was allowed to escape.

Sometimes, though seldom, the bird does escape, and circles back overhead, and you notice as it flies over you that it has no tail. At first I thought that the tail had been shot

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away, but, unless I have been misinformed, the men who shoot pigeons require that the bird shall be at the disadvantage not only of having suddenly escaped from the darkness of a collapsible trap, but of having its tail cut off.

One bird that had escaped circled round and round for some time and, in the end, returned to perch on the railings of the shooting-lawn, which it had, no doubt, come to regard as home. Another escaped bird took refuge under an iron railway bridge, where it hid itself among the girders.

I do not know how far one would be disgusted by the sight of a single pigeon being shot in circumstances of this kind. But the spectacle of the continuous succession of timid birds rising into the air out of the green traps and falling with twisted necks and jerking wings on the grass, and of the running attendant, in his green-and-yellow jersey, white shoes and bathing attendant's hat, as he refills the traps at express speed with yet more tailless pigeons, while the dog is lolloping after the dead or wounded birds, produces such an effect of cumulative horror that instead of any longer loving Monte Carlo and its lovely sea, you suddenly find yourself loathing the place as the scene of such mean and meaningless cruelty. It is, perhaps, an unreasonable mood for anyone who lives in a country in which coursing with captive rabbits

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is permitted. But then I have never been compelled to look on at rabbit-coursing.

Five paths have been worn brown in the green lawn by the feet of the attendants carrying the pigeons out to the traps. I took out my watch during the competitions. I counted that more than one bird was being trapped and shot to the minute.

Pigeon-shooting is a faster game, indeed, than roulette. At the end of an hour between sixty and a hundred birds must have been killed, and the lawn was now strewn with feathers.

I do not much like to use the overworked word 'massacre', but this continuous rain of dead and dying birds on the grass—how else can one describe it?

Nor is it only the sentimentality of the island races that takes the side of the pigeons in this fashion against the pigeon-shooters. I saw Frenchwomen hurrying away with exclamations of disgust, and when one pigeon escaped a little Frenchman clapped his hands joyfully and cried 'Bravo!'

I have never seen a bull-fight, but I am convinced that bull-fighting is a far nobler game than this shooting of dazed pigeons. Many of the pigeon-shooters are, no doubt, ordinarily good-natured men. But their sport, it seems to me, is about as sportsmanlike as striking a blind child.

Next morning I watched a Frenchman feeding

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pigeons outside the Casino and smiling with childish pleasure as they settled on his fingers and wrists.

Among the birds that hobbled fearlessly around his feet were two or three that had no tails. They were evidently pigeons that had escaped during the shooting competitions.

To kill birds so trustful as this merely for amusement—to imprison them in dark traps and then to release them only in order to shoot them at a distance at which the birds have scarcely a chance—is, as I have said, a peculiar game.

It would be a civilized act on the part of the Prince of Monaco to put an end to this defilement of one of the most beautiful places under the sun—this turning of a lovely sea-front into worse than a butcher's yard, for the butcher does not kill for sport.

XXVIII. Shop ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪

IT was near the hour at which the shops close, and, as fruit was wanted at the house at which I was staying, I went into a fruiterer's to buy some. The fruiterer was a little, bowing, bustling man who looked as if he were an enthusiastic patron of the cinematograph and as if his secret ambition were to be able to smile like Mr. Adolphe Menjou. If you asked him for some pears, he did not answer you in words, but bowed, led the way trippingly towards a box of the fruit, waved his two hands towards them, and cocked his egg-shaped head sideways at you with an inquisitive twinkle. I thought at first that he must be dumb or a foreigner, though he did utter little inarticulate squeaks that sounded like questions from under his half-moustache. Whether he spoke English or not, however, it was evident that he understood it even as I speak it, for he made no blunders as he filled two parcels for me. I handed him a pound in payment, and he took it from me with the air of a man performing in a ballet, whose task it was to convey to the meanest intelligence by means of gesture and facial expression the fact that I had handed money to him, that he had received the money from me, and that he was just about to put it

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into a till. He executed, indeed, a kind of Treasury-note dance on the floor of the shop. The till was a shabby old wooden box, with a slit in the lid somewhat wider than the slit of a money-box, and never can money have been slipped into it with a more demonstrative flourish. Equally demonstratively the little man pulled out the drawer containing the money in the box, took some silver from the front compartment and handed it to me with a pantomimic smile that said as clearly as words, 'Your change.' 'But I gave you a pound,' I said to him, for he had given me change for only ten shillings. He raised his eyebrows, opened the drawer once more, took a ten-shilling note from the top of the section which had presumably been below the slit, looked at it, put it back again, and waved his hands towards it with a quizzical smile as much as to say, 'There you are. See your note for yourself.' I knew, however, that I had given him a pound, for I had had no other money in my pocket, and I asked him, 'Does that machine of yours never make a mistake?' He shrugged his shoulders, held out his hands, palms upwards, raised his eyes to the ceiling with a look of pious appeal to Heaven, shook his head vigorously, and looked me shrewdly in the eye as only a liar can do. 'Well,' said I, 'it has made one this time.' He looked down at the drawer again, like a wading-bird watching a fish in the water, laid his hand

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on the ten-shilling note, took it out and held it in the air before me with a triumphant smile. It was an enigmatic smile that might have meant either 'There is the note you gave me. You see you have made a mistake,' or 'There is the ten shillings I owe you. Please take it. The mistake was mine and I apologize.' I gave myself the benefit of the doubt and took the ten-shilling note out of his hand, returning so far as I could smile for smile. He waved his hands again, bowed his egg-shaped head, and farewelled me out of his shop with a twinkle of the eyes under his lifted eyebrows that, I think, was meant to instil a doubt that I had, deliberately or not, robbed him of ten shillings, and that he, nevertheless, bore his loss cheerfully. Had I been in the slightest doubt on the matter, I should have thrust the note back on him, for otherwise his quizzing smile would have worked like a poison in my memory.

Whether he intended to cheat me, I cannot be sure, but neither can I help suspecting the worst. The structure of the drawer—the compartment for notes, with the ten-shilling notes placed on the top, looking as though it were the compartment into which the notes fell as they passed through the slit—suggested that the fruiterer had made careful plans for tricks on casual customers. As a rule, when I am given wrong change, I know that the mistake of the shopkeeper is an honest one, and indeed I have

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been given too much change almost as often as too little. But this little man was able to produce too much bogus evidence of his honesty, as though he had prepared his defence in advance. On the other hand, it is difficult to believe that it would be worth any shopkeeper's while to have a lying cash-box even in a district in which chance customers are common. Obviously he cannot cheat his regular customers regularly in this fashion. There is nothing of which human beings more quickly grow tired than of being cheated. It is a common enough form of dishonesty to add to a new bill the last items on a bill that has already been paid, but the shops at which this is done probably lose more money by it than they gain, owing to the number of customers who leave them in resentment. As for robbing casual customers, I doubt if the ordinary human being is easy to rob. Even a poet has usually a fair notion of the amount of change he should get, and there are mystics who would create a scene on a 'bus if the conductor gave them a penny too little in error. If a shopkeeper set out to cheat his customers by giving them insufficient change, I doubt if he would make enough by it to keep himself in cigarettes. If it were possible to become rich by such means, on the other hand, I have no doubt that this form of theft would become fairly common. There is a considerable proportion of human beings who are honest only

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so far as it pays to be honest, and who regard money-making as a game of skill in which any kind of trickery is legitimate if it is safe. They will sell you gold watches for five shillings, knowing full well that they are not gold, and that neither will they go. They will dilute the whisky in public-houses, selling water to their customers at twelve-and-sixpence a quart—an extortionate price even for one of the necessities of life. It is their hour of triumph when they get rid of damaged wares at the price of good ones. The sellers of horses had a bad name for doing this in other centuries, and there are men selling second-hand motor-cars to-day who have a reputation for the same kind of cleverness. There is, I am sure, a profound pleasure to be got from dishonesty. The habitual trickster probably gets in the end to enjoy playing a successful trick as much as card-players enjoy winning a game of cards. Among the varieties of human nature you need not be surprised to find a number of people who would take more pleasure in making a pound by a trick than honestly. Men seldom take a pride in their virtues—certainly the virtuous do not—but most of them take a pride in their cleverness, and the most elementary form of cleverness consists in tricking a fellow-mortal out of something that belongs to him.

We can scarcely explain the popularity of the trickster in literature except on the assumption

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that the love of trickery is widespread and that there is a roguish element in most of us. Ulysses, it is true, is in a different world from the three-card-trick men or the man who deliberately gives you a bad half-crown in your change, but his trickeries have won him the admiration of centuries. Reynard the Fox had few of the virtues of Ulysses, but the world triumphed delightedly in his triumphs over honest beasts in scores of stories in the Middle Ages. There are hundreds of picaresque novels in which we applaud clever rascality, and I am not certain that Jacob was always so ill thought of for the trick he played on Isaac as he is at the present day. Had he not lacked charm, he would undoubtedly have been a popular character. There is no great need for an honest man to be charming, but a rogue must be as charming as he is clever if he is to be tolerable. He must steal with the appearance of good nature, and lie as though he were doing you a service. That many great rogues possess this charm is clear, both from books and from everyday experience. A man may rob the widow and orphan and yet be more charming than the Archbishop of Canterbury. Falstaff is so charming that, though he is a thief, most of us prefer him to the Prince who, in a virtuous mood, cast him off, and he has almost as many partisans as Mary, Queen of Scots. Becky Sharp, who was not above cheating a needy tradesman, casts such

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a spell, despite Thackeray's castigation of her crimes, that Amelia Sedley seems a poor creature in comparison. Long John Silver, again, is a charming villain in whose final escape from the gallows, though at times we may have hated him, we not only acquiesce but rejoice. In the present century the novelists have invested even burglars with charm, though charm is less necessary in that than in most of the crooked professions. Possibly, however, there are charming burglars to be found even in real life. There have certainly been charming murderers, charming embezzlers, charming bigamists. Is it not by means of their charm that they make vice look more virtuous than virtue itself looks ?

The little fruiterer, I should say, had charm—not overwhelming charm, but enough charm to be a pleasant figure in the memory. There was no air of meanness about his small effort at cheating. He played his part as though it amused him, and if he felt any shame, he did not show it. You could not find a more amiable man from whom to buy decayed pears. If it were necessary for me to be tricked out of half a sovereign, this is the man I should choose to do the trick. My only objection to him is that he made me feel rather guiltier, as I left the shop, than he felt himself. I hope he did not need the ten shillings badly. Possibly he has had bad luck on the Turf, and had no other

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means of making up his losses. If this is the case, his smiling courage is all the more to be admired. Perhaps his equanimity broke down after I had left the shop, and he dissolved into tears. I hope not. I cannot help liking the little man when I remember his busy pantomime of honesty. But I will not buy fruit in his shop again.

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